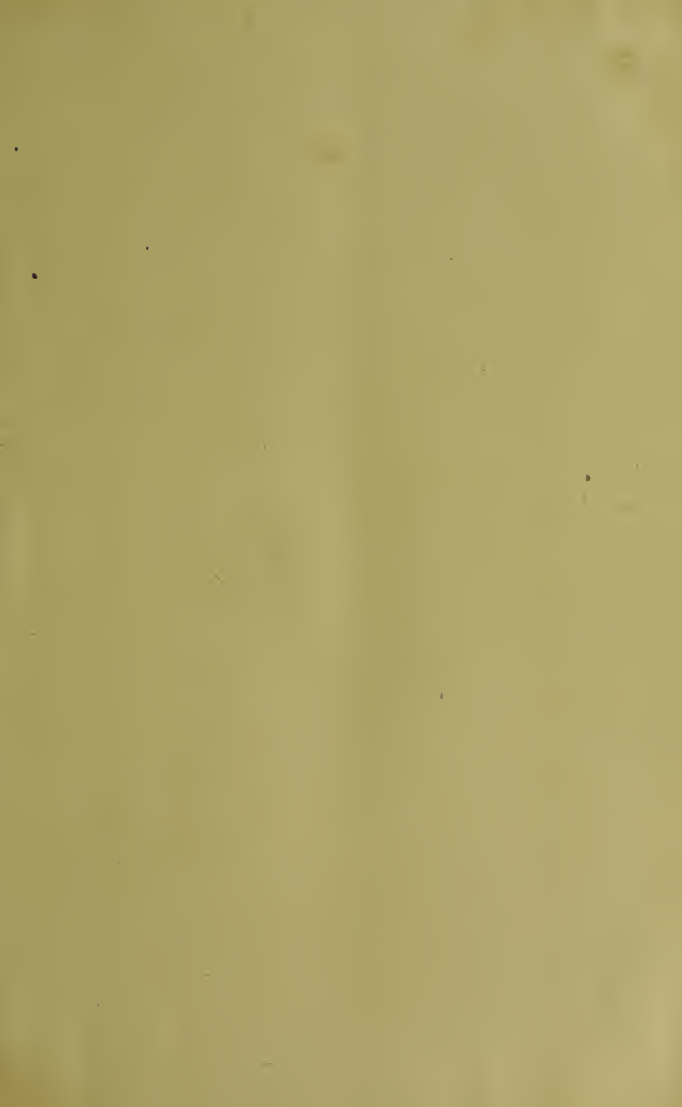


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# THE PENITENT'S PRAYER:

A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

OF THE

FIFTY-FIRST PSALM.

BY THE

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“AND now could the author flatter himself that any one would take half the pleasure in reading the following exposition, which he hath taken in writing it, he would not fear the loss of his labour. The employment detached him from the bustle and hurry of life, the din of politics, and the noise of folly; vanity and vexation flew away for a season, care and disquietude came not near his dwelling. He arose fresh as the morning to his task: the silence of the night invited him to pursue it: and he can truly say, that food and rest were not preferred before it. Every psalm improved infinitely on his acquaintance with it; and no one gave him uneasiness but the last: for then he grieved that his work was done. Happier hours than those which have been spent on these meditations on the Songs of Sion he never expects to see in this world. Very pleasantly did they pass, and moved smoothly and swiftly along; for when thus engaged, he counted no time. They are gone, but have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind, and the remembrance of them is sweet.”—BISHOP HORNE’S *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Preface, pp. 61, 62.

“THE force of David’s character was vast, and the scope of his life was immense. His harp was full-stringed, and every angel of joy and of sorrow swept over the chords as he passed; but the melody always breathed of heaven. With the defence of his backslidings, which he hath himself more keenly scrutinised, more clearly decerned against, and more bitterly lamented, than any of his censors, we do not charge ourselves, because they were, in a manner, necessary, that he might be the full-orbed

man which was needed to utter every form of spiritual feeling : but if, when of these acts he became convinced, he be found less true to God and to righteousness ; indisposed to repentance and sorrow and anguish ; exculpatory of himself ; stout-hearted in his courses ; a formalist in his penitence ; or in any way less worthy of a spiritual man in those than in the rest of his infinite moods,—then verily strike him from the canon, and let his psalms become monkish legends, or what you please. But if these penitential psalms discover the soul's deepest hell of agony, and lay bare the iron ribs of misery whereon the very heart dissolveth, and if they express the same in words which melt the soul that conceiveth, and bow the head that uttereth them,—then, we say, let us keep these records of the Psalmist's grief and despondency as the most precious of his utterances, and sure to be needed in the case of every man who essayeth to live a spiritual life.”—EDWARD IRVING.

# THE PENITENT'S PRAYER.

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## PSALM LI.

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts : and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness ; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence ; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ; and uphold me *with thy* free Spirit.

13 *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways ; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation : *and* my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

15 O Lord, open thou my lips ; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give *it* : thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

18 Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion : build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering : then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.



THE metrical version that follows is commonly called "the Scotch version." It was originally the production of Mr Francis Rous, a younger son of Sir Anthony Rous, at Halton in Cornwall. Rous was several times returned and served as a member of Parliament; was one of the lay commissioners to the Westminster Assembly of Divines; and was in 1643 settled as Provost of Eton College. In April 1646, the House of Commons ordered "that Rous's Psalms, and no other, shall be sung in all churches and chapels within England, Wales, and Berwick-upon-Tweed, after the first of next January." The Scottish General Assembly took this translation in hand, after the Westminster Assembly had greatly improved it; and they also, having carefully revised it, authorised it to be used in any congregation or family after the 1st of May 1650. "Thus at length, the old Scottish version, first printed in 1564 by Lekpreuik, was formally superseded. This more modern one has remained during two centuries unaltered, except by a few slight variations in orthography." It is still in use throughout all the Presbyterian churches, both in Scotland and in England. The reader is referred to the Appendix for a reprint of the psalm as it finally left the hand of Rous, in 1646. He will also find there several other metrical versions, which I have selected from those possessed by my friend, William Bonar, Esq., to whose library, and kind help, I have been indebted in the preparation of the following pages more than I can adequately express. I owe thanks also to another dear friend, Dr Macaulay, for judicious hints; and to another old college friend, E. S. Dallas, Esq., many ways dear to me.

1 After thy loving-kindness, Lord,  
    have mercy upon me :  
For thy compassions great, blot out  
    all mine iniquity.

- 2 Me cleanse from sin, and thoroughly wash  
from mine iniquity :
- 3 For my transgressions I confess ;  
my sin I ever see.
- 4 'Gainst thee, thee only, have I sinn'd,  
in thy sight done this ill ;  
That when thou speak'st thou may'st be just,  
and clear in judging still.
- 5 Behold, I in iniquity  
was form'd the womb within ;  
My mother also me conceiv'd  
in guiltiness and sin.
- 6 Behold, thou in the inward parts  
with truth delighted art ;  
And wisdom thou shalt make me know  
within the hidden part.
- 7 Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me,  
I shall be cleansed so ;  
Yea, wash thou me, and then I shall  
be whiter than the snow.



- 8 Of gladness and of joyfulness  
make me to hear the voice ;  
That so these very bones which thou  
hast broken may rejoice.
- 9 All mine iniquities blot out,  
thy face hide from my sin.
- 10 Create a clean heart, Lord, renew  
a right sp'rit me within.
- 11 Cast me not from thy sight, nor take  
thy Holy Sp'rit away.
- 12 Restore me thy salvation's joy ;  
with thy free Sp'rit me stay.
- 13 Then will I teach thy ways unto  
those that transgressors be ;  
And those that sinners are shall then  
be turned unto thee.
- 14 O God, of my salvation God,  
me from blood-guiltiness  
Set free ; then shall my tongue aloud  
sing of thy righteousness.

- 15 My closed lips, O Lord, by thee  
let them be opened ;  
Then shall thy praises by my mouth  
abroad be published.
- 16 For thou desir'st not sacrifice,  
else would I give it thee ;  
Nor wilt thou with burnt-offering  
at all delighted be.
- 17 A broken spirit is to God  
a pleasing sacrifice :  
A broken and a contrite heart,  
Lord, thou wilt not despise.
- 18 Shew kindness, and do good, O Lord,  
to Sion, thine own hill :  
The walls of thy Jerusalem  
build up of thy good will.
- 19 Then righteous off'rings shall thee please,  
and off'rings burnt, which they  
With whole burnt-off'rings, and with calves,  
shall on thine altar lay.

THE following exceedingly beautiful version is by Mary, Countess of Pembroke (about 1570). "The Psalmes of David, Translated into Divers, and Sundry Kindes of Verse, more rare and excellent for the method and variety than ever yet hath been done in English. Begun by the noble and learned Gent. Sir Philip Sidney, Knt.; and finished by the Right Honourable the Countess of Pembroke, his Sister. Now first printed from a copy of the original Manuscript, Transcribed by John Davies of Hereford, in the reign of James the First:" 1823. Sir Philip translates as far as the 43d Psalm, the Countess those which follow.

O Lord, whose grace no limits comprehend ;

Sweet Lord, whose mercies stand from measure  
free ;

To me that grace, to me that mercy send,

And wipe, O Lord, my sins from sinful me ;

O cleanse, O wash my foul iniquity ;

Cleanse still my spots, still wash away my stainings,

Till stains and spots in me leave no remainings.

For I, alas ! acknowledging, do know

My filthy fault ; my faulty filthiness

To my soul's eye incessantly doth show ;

Which done to thee, to thee I do confess,

Just Judge, true Witness ; that for righteousness  
Thy doom may pass, against my guilt awarded,  
Thy evidence for truth may be regarded.

My mother, lo ! when I began to be,  
Conceiving me, with me did sin conceive ;  
And, as with living heat she cherish'd me,  
Corruption did like cherishing receive ;  
But lo ! thy love to purest good doth cleave,  
And inward truth, which, hardly else discerned,  
My truant soul in thy hid school hath learned.

Then (as thyself to lepers hath assign'd)  
With hyssop, Lord, with hyssop purge me so,  
And that shall cleanse the lepr'y of my mind ;  
Make over me thy mercy's streams to flow,  
So shall my whiteness scorn the whitest snow ;  
To ear and heart send sounds and thoughts of glad-  
ness,  
That bruised bones may leave away their sadness.

Thy ill-pleased eye from my misdeeds avert ;  
Cancel the registers my sins contain ;  
Create in me a clean, pure, spotless heart ;

Inspire a spirit where love of right may reign,  
And cast me not from thee ; take not again  
Thy breathing grace ; again thy comfort send me,  
And let the guard of thy free Spirit attend me.

So I to them a guiding hand will be,  
Whose faulty feet have wander'd from thy way ;  
And, turn'd from sin, will make return to thee,  
Whom, turn'd from thee, sin erst had turn'd astray.  
O God, God of my health, O do away  
My bloody crime ; so shall my tongue be raised  
To praise thy truth, enough cannot be praised.

Unlock my lips, shut up with sinful shame,  
Then shall my mouth, O Lord, thy honour sing ;  
For bleeding fuel for thy altar's flame,  
To gain thy grace, what boots it me to bring ?  
Burnt-offerings are to thee no pleasant thing :  
The sacrifice that God will hold respected  
Is the heart-broken soul, the spirit dejected.

Lastly, O Lord, how so I stand, or fall,  
Leave not thy loved Sion to embrace ;  
But with thy favour build up Salem's wall,

And still in peace maintain that peaceful place ;  
Then shalt thou turn a well-accepted face  
To sacred fires, with offer'd gifts perfumed,  
Till even whole calves on altars be consumed.

## LITERAL TRANSLATION.

THE following is a translation from the Hebrew, made as literal as possible, consistently with the idiom of the languages. It is intended, as well as the Notes, for the reader who is unacquainted with the original. In the Hebrew Bible the title is always numbered with the other verses as here :—

1 To the overseer, a Psalm of David.

2 In the coming to him of Nathan the prophet, as he had come unto Bathsheba.

3 Be merciful to me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness : according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

4 Multiply thou, wash me from mine iniquity ; and from my sin cleanse me.

5 For my transgressions I know ; and my sin [is] before me continually.

6 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and this evil in thine eyes have I done, that thou mayest be justified in thine utterance, thou shalt be clear in thy judgment.

7 Behold, in iniquity was I brought forth, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

8 Behold, thou hast delighted in truth in the inward parts ; and, in that which is hidden, wisdom thou hadst made me know.

9 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : thou wilt wash me, and more than snow shall I be white.

10 Thou wilt make me hear joy and gladness, shall rejoice the bones thou hast broken.

11 Hide thy face from my sins, and all mine iniquities blot out.

12 A pure heart create to me, O God : and an established spirit renew in my midst.

13 Do not cast me from thy presence, and the Spirit of thy holiness do not take from me.

14 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation : and let the free Spirit uphold me.

15 I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners unto thee shall turn.



16 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall joyfully-celebrate thy righteousness.

17 O Lord, my lips thou wilt open: and my mouth will shew forth thy praise.

18 For thou delightest not in sacrifice, or I would give it: with burnt-offering thou wilt not be pleased.

19 The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit: a heart broken and contrite, O God, thou wilt not despise.

20 Do good in thy pleasure to Zion: thou wilt build the walls of Jerusalem.

21 Then thou wilt delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer upon thine altar bullocks.

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## NOTES.

Ver. 2. "The significant repetition of the phrase '*came unto*,' is lost in the English, and most other versions. *As* is not a mere particle of time, simply equivalent to *when*, but suggests the ideas of analogy,

proportion, and retaliation.”—*Professor Alexander, The Psalms Translated and Explained.* London, 1851.

Ver. 3. “*Loving-kindness*” and “*tender mercies*” are each represented in the Hebrew by a single word. The former is used as a name for God in Psalm cxliv. 2, “My mercy:” the latter is a word of peculiarly tender affection.

Ver. 4. “*Multiply thou, wash me,*” is an expressive Hebrew idiom of which the meaning is obvious—wash me again and again, till I am altogether clean, “thoroughly.”

Ver. 5. “*For I know:*” The word is never used for “confession.” It is simply a thorough and emphatic knowledge and conviction of sin. It is quite an equivalent to “acknowledge.” My sin is thoroughly known, and entirely before me, ready to be put before Thee. The confession comes fully out in the next verse.

Ver. 6. We have no single English word that exactly expresses the meaning of the Hebrew word which I have inelegantly rendered “in thine *utterance*.” The Hebrew word means, as it is here used, certain things which have been spoken. Sermon,

discourse, speech, are each too formal, and have each too special applications. So also "in thy judgment." There is no single English word that exactly expresses the Hebrew noun, without ambiguity. It is a spoken decision : a decision arrived at and uttered.

Ver. 8. "*In the inward parts :*" In the Hebrew it is expressed by only one word. "Used as the seat of the mind and thoughts, Ps. li. 8, 'Behold thou delightest in truth in the *reins* [of a man.]" — *Gesenius, Lexicon*. "*In that which is hidden,*" is also one word. The sense is obvious. It may be of importance to the merely English reader to know that the Hebrew verb here rendered "thou hast delighted," is the same verb that is rendered by the same words in verses 18 and 21.

Ver. 9. "*Thou wilt wash me,*" is equivalent to "thou wilt wash me, wilt thou not? Wilt thou not wash me? Wash thou me." So in ver. 10, "Thou wilt make me to hear joy and gladness, wilt thou not?" so also ver. 17, "My lips thou wilt open, wilt thou not?" and ver. 20.

Ver. 12. "*An established spirit :*" The Hebrew word is in the form of a participle, and is used, for

example, in Ps. xciii. 2, "Thy throne is *established*;" Ps. lvii. 7, "My heart is *fixed*;" 1 Kings ii. 45, "The throne of David shall be *established*."

Ver. 14. It will help the reader to an understanding of the word here rendered "*free*," to know that it is the word that occurs in Song of Sol. vi. 12, "the chariots of Ammi-*nadib*," and is rendered in the margin, "my *willing* people." The word occurs also, *e. g.*, in Exod. xxxv. 5, "Whosoever is of a *willing* heart;" 2 Chron. xxix. 31, "As many as were of a *free* heart;" Isaiah xxxii. 5, "The vile person shall no more be called *liberal*;" ver. 8, "But *the liberal* deviseth *liberal things*, and by *liberal things* shall he stand."

Ver. 16. "*Blood-guiltiness*:" The Hebrew noun is in the plural, and means literally "bloods." But it is used frequently, idiomatically, in the plural, to signify "blood as shed." Ps. v. 6, "A man of bloods," is a man who has shed blood, one who is blood-guilty.

Ver. 19. The word here rendered "*contrite*" means "broken," "crushed." The same Hebrew word appears in ver. 10, "The bones which thou hast *broken*."

## THE TITLE.

THE title of the psalm is part of the inspired record. Most of the old expositors dwell long and profitably upon it. I shall condense some of the most suggestive matter from various sources not very accessible to the general reader, retaining the quaint old forms of expression.

How frail the strongest saint is in himself: what need has he who thinketh he standeth to take heed lest he fall: for this holy prophet, the sweet singer of Israel, was foully defiled by his going in to Bathsheba. This man lay still in his sin, till God in his mercy did waken him up by sending Nathan unto him. How acceptable the reproof of God's ministers ought to be to God's people. Nathan the prophet rebuked David the seer, and David accepted this office at his hands; and here honourable mention is made of Nathan's fidelity. How little a true penitent doth stand to shame him-

self, when his sin has dishonoured God and he sees that the confession of it may glorify God ; and how far the penmen of Holy Scripture do differ in this point from the writers of human histories, David in the inscription of this psalm giveth proof.

“Sin and indolence are very nearly allied. Security and danger are seldom far asunder. Idle folks tempt the devil to tempt them. A most convincing proof of all which we have in the circumstances of David's fall. The object was presented, the eye wandered, the flesh lusted, and the heart was ensnared. Oh, what need have we to pray continually, Turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity !”

This psalm was placed by the Wisest in the midst of the other penitential psalms, even as the sun is placed in the midst of the firmament. The singing of psalms in the assemblies of God's people is not only an ancient, but very lawful and commendable custom in the Church of God. The birds, which are but poor creatures in respect of man, should stir us up to sing psalms. It should make a man to blush when he considers how the nightingale and lark, every morning and evening, sing out their notes to the glory of their Maker.

Writers of the Scriptures set forth first their own imperfections. "David recorded his adultery and murder, as here in this psalm his repentance of them; Jonah, his disobedience; Job, his impatience; the idolatry of Solomon; the discontentedness of Moses; the fretting of Jeremiah; Matthew, his tax-gathering; Paul, his persecutions, and the like. If we would compare these writers, inspired by the Holy Ghost, with the works and writings of other men, we must either shut our eyes, or else acknowledge a great difference."

The child of God may fall after he is called. It is the Lord's mercy sometimes to let a man fall into sin; for, as we build a wall the higher by casting the foundation deeper, so the Lord, by humbling His children, oftentimes raiseth them up. As in a tempestuous wind trees shaken by the root, in calm do spread themselves the more, so the child of God, having his roots shaken, doth more strongly fasten himself in Christ Jesus.

"Let all ladies and godly women take heed," says an old divine; "let them look on Bathsheba, a worthy woman, and let them fear to give any entertainment to lust, for they may be sooner overtaken

than they are aware of. Look unto thine eyes and to thy company, lest thou be polluted by the society of unchaste persons. Yea, it may admonish all men and women, though never so confident, chaste, and religious, to fear themselves, and to cut off all occasions to unchastity, as pride in apparel, self-conceit, evil company, idleness, and the like, which be foregoers of this sin; yet none of these sins go alone, but some other sins do always accompany them."

The word preached is the ordinary means to beget faith and repentance. David slumbered in his sin till God sent His prophet unto him: "I have a message from God unto thee." And, further, ministers must reprove the greatest personages. Nathan, the humble, poor prophet, rebukes the mighty David, the greatest, wealthiest king, perhaps, then in the world. Besides all this, men must be charged with their special sins. *Thou art the man* that hast done this thing. Thus John the Baptist dealt with Herod; thus the Lord of glory dealt with the woman of Samaria.

"Observe the great wisdom of the Spirit of God, who, speaking of a foul and filthy fact, uses a reverent and chaste speech, very honest and decent;



and, therefore, we learn that, as the Spirit of God speaks, so must we inure and acquaint ourselves to speak. Yea, when we are to relate things that are not comely to be spoken, to moderate our speech, and to speak in an honest and chaste manner. So the Holy Ghost exhorts us that 'our words should be gracious, and powdered with salt: and such as may minister grace to the hearers. But as for filthy communication or foolish jesting, which is not comely, let it not be once named amongst you.'" How fearful is the sin of those who feed the unhallowed fires of lust with the coals of the altar, and fan the flames of it with the breath of God's Spirit; yea, who kindle the flame at the holy fire that burns on the altar of God! O my soul, come not thou into their secrets.

Another good doctrine is here. The godly do respect more the glory of God than their own credit. "Mark that David, a glorious and renowned king of Israel, is content to shame himself for ever, and to have his sins recorded to his own shame, so that he may procure God's glory and the good of His Church; for he was confident that this example of his grievous fall being recorded in God's book, would

turn, by God's blessing, to the endless comfort and good of His Church. For what singular comfort is this to God's children, when they shall remember that the falls and slips of such worthy men are recorded in God's book? And if this were not, our faith would fail, and we should even utterly despair."

Note "the placing of the words *come* and *go*, in which there is a tacit contrast. After David had *gone in* unto Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan is said to have *come in* unto him. But by that impure approach he had gone back far from God. The goodness of God, therefore, shone so much the brighter in that He stretched out His hand afar off to pull back a runaway."—*Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms*, in loc.

Thus does Matthew Henry sum up his remarks on the title:—"What were the workings of David's heart towards God upon this occasion, by Divine inspiration he drew up into a psalm, that it might be often repeated, and long after reviewed; and this he committed to the chief musician to be sung in the public service of the Church,—1st, As a profession of his own repentance, which he would have to be generally taken notice of, his sin having been

notorious, that the plaster might be as wide as the wound. Those that truly repent of their sins will not be ashamed to own their repentance, but having lost the honour of innocents, will rather covet the honour of penitents. 2d, As a pattern to others,\* both to bring them to repentance by his example, and to instruct them in their repentance what to do

\* “Why were such oceans of feeling poured into David’s soul, such true and graceful utterance of poetry infused into his lips, and such skill of music seated in his right hand? Such oceans of feeling did God infuse into his soul, and such utterance of poetry He placed between his lips, and such skilful music He seated in his right hand, in order that he might conceive forms of feelings for all saints, and create an everlasting psalmody, and hand down an organ for expressing the melody of the renewed soul. God allowed him not to curtail his being by treading the round of one function; but by every variety of functions he cultivated his whole being, and filled his soul with wisdom and feeling. He found him objects for every affection, that the affection might not slumber and die. He brought him up in the sheep pastures, that the groundwork of his character might be laid amongst the simple and universal forms of feeling. He took him to the camp and made him a conqueror, that he might be filled with nobleness of soul, and ideas of glory. He placed him in the palace, that he might be filled with ideas of majesty and sovereign might. He carried him to the wilderness, that his soul might dwell alone in the sublime conceptions of God and His mighty works; and He kept him there for long years with only one step between him and death, that he might be well schooled to trust and depend upon the providence of God: and in none of these various conditions and avocations of life

and what to say. Being converted himself, he then strengthens his brethren; and for this cause he obtained mercy."

did he take away from him His Holy Spirit. His trials were but the tunings of the instrument with which the Spirit might express the various melodies which He designed to utter by him for the consolation and edification of spiritual men. We will also add, that by his loss the Church hath gained: and that out of the evil of his ways, much good hath been made to arise; and that if he had not passed through every valley of humiliation and stumbled upon the dark mountains, we should not have had a language for the souls of the penitent, or an expression for the dark troubles which compass the soul that feareth to be deserted by its God."—*Edward Irving*.

VER. 1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

SOME one has said that the Psalms are the heart of the Bible ; then this psalm is the heart of the Psalms. If one could know all the consciences that have been informed and quickened, all the hearts that have been cleansed, and all the comfort and peace that have been brought to troubled souls by means of this psalm alone, then should one have a better idea than those which are familiar to us, of how much good God can bring out of even one evil. If David had never sinned thus wickedly, he had never repented thus bitterly.\*

\* “ The penitent’s first ground for hope of pardon is his own misery, and the Divine mercy which rejoiceth to relieve that misery. The riches, the power, and the glory of a kingdom, can neither prevent nor remove the torment of sin, which puts the monarch and the beggar upon a level. Every transgression leaves behind it a guilt and a stain : the account between God and the sinner is crossed by the blood of the great propitiatory

David was eminent as a Christian, so to speak of one of the Old Testament saints : he was in many things a pattern to believers : he was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ ; so that our Lord is often called *David*, and is even said to sit on David's throne ; yet this David fell into sin,—sin too of the worst and most unutterable sort,—sin so base and vile that many men of the world, who neither fear God nor regard man, would scorn it, and would abjure the company of the man who is known to commit it. Adultery is very hateful guilt ; murder is much worse. What sin can outstrip these two combined ? And yet David committed them both. This psalm, as the title of it fully shews, faithfully tells us what he did “when he came to himself.”

If you want to know a man, do not seek only to know what he did before his sin, and do not ask in what manner did he sin ; but inquire, what did he do after he had sinned ? Did he abide in it ? Did he look back on it with pleasure ? Did he seek to justify himself, and to make it appear that his sin

sacrifice, which removes the former ; and the soul is cleansed by the Holy Spirit, which takes out the latter.”—*Bishop Horne on the Psalms*, in loc.

was not nearly so bad and black as it was thought to be? Did he say, "Noah sinned, and Job sinned, and Moses sinned, and I am no worse than they?" Did he say, as the sinners of our day keep saying, "David sinned, and I am no worse than David?" Did he go diligently about, seeking to piece and patch his torn reputation? Did he hush up the spreading report by every means in his power? Did he bribe and threaten men into secrecy? Did he repeat the sin? Did he go about the borders of it, and continue to hover round the place where that and the like offences were committed? Or, did he go to God with it? Was it his trouble that God knew, that God saw, that God abhorred, that God was grieved? What did he do after his sin?

Whatever others may do, David goes first straight to God, the fountain of all law, against whom all sin is committed, from whom, and from whom alone, all mercy flows. At least this he did when God wakened him up to repentance. The sin ends then. Long it was persisted in, but God sent His messenger to him at last; and conscience, wakened up, echoed the prophet's utterance, and said, "Thou art the man." He goes to God then, and his first



cry is for mercy ; and he seeks it from that very God against whom he had sinned. And see how he seeks it. It is, "according to thy loving-kindness."

Here is a notable difference between faith and unbelief. Faith sees sin to be great, and very great ; unbelief ever tries to make it out to be but very small. David did not think that his sin was a little sin : he thought it a great sin ; a sin so great that he had no expectation whatever of getting pardon for it from man. He must go to God, the fountain and wellspring of all grace and mercy ; there alone, where the mercy is so great, can so great a sinner get pardon.

Man could not pardon it, would not pardon it. Not a voice was heard, not a hand was raised for the king, throughout the whole land. He had no faith in man ; he expected no forgiveness at the hand of man : man's drop of mercy is but shallow ; a great sin can find no covering there. And this leads us to note another difference between nature and grace, or faith and unbelief. Nature expects more from man than from God ; grace expects more from God than from man. Nature will not seek from God that which man would not give ; grace



would not seek, nor expect to get, that from man which God would not give. Nature says, If man cannot do it, it cannot be done ; grace says, If God cannot do it, it cannot be done. Nature says, It is in the hand of God, and, therefore, I cannot get it ; grace says, It is in the hand and in the heart of God, and, therefore, being there, it is mine.

Thus it is that David, getting up out of the dust and dirt into which he had fallen, and finding heaven and earth, God, man, and devils, all ranged against him, first, as is *natural*, looks round on friends, neighbours, and acquaintances, and sees nothing but knit brows and angry faces. But he looks up, and lo ! heaven's blue is deep, and clear, and calm. There is no limit to that but his imperfect vision. God is great ; His mercy is great above these heavens ; and with a breaking heart he cries, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness."

"According to man's measure of mercy, there is neither help nor hope for me. According to the measure of the mercy and depth of the loving-kindness of those around me, I am undone, and utterly lost. I therefore betake me to Thee. Thy mercy,

O Lord, is in the heavens, not in this cold, callous, heartless earth. There is no limit to Thy mercy, no bound to Thy loving-kindness. There is none anywhere, either on earth or in heaven, that could or would forgive such sins of such a sinner as I am ; but with Thee is the fountain of mercy. There is forgiveness with Thee ; there is pardon there : grace abounding there even to the chief of sinners."

It is mercy he needs, and so it is mercy he seeks ; and he goes up at once to the source. There were many priests in Jerusalem. There were many God-chosen, God-appointed, and, we may even say, God-approved and God-loved priests there ; but David the king wants mercy, and so he passes them all by, and goes straight up to the throne of grace. I will go to God, says he ; and bowing down before the mercy-seat, all guilty as he is, he offers up his own petition, through the one Mediator, and cries, "Have mercy on me, O God."

And, then, consider the measure which David thinks needful to originate his pardon. There is some mercy in man. There are some men in whom you will find the grace of mercy greatly developed ; but that measure will not do. Mercy may be sup-

posed to be in a great, in a very great degree among the angels of God ; but neither will that measure do. It is only *Thy* loving-kindness and *Thy* tender mercies that will do. With Thee alone is there grace and mercy, in a measure great enough for my need. *According to* THY loving-kindness.

God's kindness is very kind. It is "loving." God's kindness is more than ordinary, and more than extraordinary ; it must be called "loving." The kindness is loving, and the love is kind. There is no love like His, no kindness like His. All kindness but this, if you use it often, wears out. However great the kindness of a neighbour be, if you keep daily drawing upon it you will soon exhaust it. The kindness of a friend has limits which are soon reached and passed. The kindness of a father, or, to go a step farther still, the kindness of a mother—for that is the kindest that this world possesses—that, even that, has its limits. "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Yes, even she may forget ; her kindness—and it is very loving—may fail : but I will not forget thee ; for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ;

but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

God's kindness is loving. It is the strong band of love that makes it so long and so lasting. You cannot break that cord, it is so fine and yet so strong. The black brutality of murder, combined with the baseness of adultery, cannot do it. This guilty, heart-stricken man comes up to God, and stands before Him, his adulterous hand reeking with his brother's blood ; he has no plea to urge but this—"Thy loving-kindness and the multitude of thy tender mercies ;" and yet he goes away saying, in the apostle's words, "But I obtained mercy."

After this, who will presume: for what man could presume on such loving-kindness as this, on mercies so tender as these? And after this, who need despair? What murderer, what adulterer, what combination of murder with adultery need despair: for this God is our God: He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever?

"Blot out my transgressions," says he, "according to the multitude of thy tender mercies." He does not say "mercy," but "mercies." And they

are "tender." They are unbounded, and they are "tender." Our mercy is not tender. What little mercy you find in man is often harsh and hard. It is not tender at all. It is a common saying among us, "I forgive, but I do not forget." We forgive with an air of superiority, superciliously. There is often harshness, hardness, unkindness in the way in which our mercy is bestowed. You have often received mercy in such a way as to make you feel that you had nearly paid for it in having to suffer the rude, unkindly manner in which it was bestowed. And even when that is not so, but when man bestows his kindness and vouchsafes his mercy in his blindest way, you could never think of calling it "tender." That would be about the last epithet you would think of applying to it. But God forgives; and when He forgives He does it tenderly. There is no upbraiding. He blots out the transgression, and there is no more remembrance of it at all. He forgets as soon as He forgives. It is done in a gentle way. There is nothing but kindness in the glance of the eye, and nothing but tenderness in the tone of the voice. "Be of good cheer: thy sins are forgiven thee." The sin is swept away; it is cast

behind His back into the depths of the sea. He says to a weeping woman, "She has been forgiven much, and therefore she loveth much." To another, "Go in peace." And when Saul of Tarsus is persecuting the saints of the Lord Jesus, and the Lord comes down to pardon him, He says, *It is hard for thee*: thou persecutest Me: but it is hard *for thee*. God's mercies are very tender.

And then they are a multitude. Tender in their nature, they are a multitude in their number. They are numberless, measureless, endless. Like the stars, man cannot count them. Like the grains of sand that cushion yonder wave-beaten shore, no man knows how many they be. They begin with our birth; yea, they began long before; for Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake, I am still with Thee. God's mercies, beginning with our birth, are heaped up around

and upon us all day long, and all through our life-journey.

Here lies another difference between nature and grace. Nature leads a man to expect mercy from man, but none from God. Yet, when it comes to man, it hardly goes the length of expecting "mercies;" more seldom still, "tender" mercies; and never, a "multitude." You go once to a man with some faith of getting what you ask, and you ask and you get. And on the faith of that asking and getting, you go again in some extremity, and again you ask and again you get. If hard pressed, you may go a third time, and you are scarcely disappointed should you meet with a rebuff. It is what you all but expected; and you get your refusal on the ground of the favours formerly granted. And even when you are not refused, there comes a limit to your own power of asking. You can bring yourself in no way to go again. You say to yourself, I have been so frequently there, that it is useless to go again.

But grace goes to God, and it goes again, and it never comes empty away; and it gets as it goes, and is strengthened and emboldened by the getting; and, so far from feeling that past gifts are any bar



to the expectation of present or of future favours, it makes these very past gifts, yea, their very multitude, the ground of asking further, and of getting more. The argument is not, Because I have seldom got from you before, and will not seek from you again : it is the reverse ; it is, Because I have gotten before, and am still needy, and expect to have goodness and mercy following me all the days of my life.

We can soon exhaust both man's power and will of giving. All that is in man is in the stream, and, apart from the source, the stream soon runs dry ; but you cannot exhaust the ocean-fulness of the great deep. God's mercies are a multitude which no man can number. He has mercy of all sorts, for all kinds and all degrees of sin. The fulness of it is as the waves of the sea, which roll on in an endless flow night and day for evermore.

It is *mercy* this man seeks : it is mercy he needs : it is mercy we all need. He needed it, and he sought it : do we seek it ? We need it every day : do we seek it every day ? There are some men who do not feel their need, and therefore do not seek ; they do not cry. But though they are silent, and



just because they are silent, no men need mercy so much as do they. There is life, and therefore there is hope, in a man who cries. A living dog is better than a dead lion. But he who is silent is going swiftly down to the pit, all the more swiftly that it is so silently. Yon dark water, see how it darts on in dead silence even a little way above that headlong fall! This great world, how it wheels on!—how swiftly and how still! It is well when a man cries. I once saw a man on the top of a tall ladder. He was at work repairing some defect on the outside of a lofty building. A passing vehicle touched the ladder's foot: it swayed from the perpendicular, swung rapidly off, and fell to the ground with a crash. The man clutched the building with crooked, iron fingers, held on convulsively for a few seconds, and then he too fell to the ground, with that damp, dull, heavy, dead sound which the human body thus falling alone causes. The bystanders stood stricken with horror for a few brief moments. We listened; all was still: there was neither voice nor motion. But that stillness was more awful than would have been the most horrid cries; for it betokened death; the stillness, therefore, quickened

every step, and the beating of every heart. Reader, are you thus still? Are you lying prostrate from the effects of the fall, uttering no cry, offering no prayer to God for mercy?

A man who is condemned to death by an earthly judge is moved away mechanically from the bar; he goes clanking down to the cells below in the dull stupor of hopeless silence. He knows that the cry for mercy there would be vain, for mercy no man there can bestow; but give that man a chance of approach to the sovereign. See, now, how speedily his tongue is unloosed! The chance is of the smallest, yet his cry is the loudest, the most earnest, eloquent, urgent.

We are guilty, and condemned to death eternal. We are in the presence of the Sovereign Dispenser of all grace and mercy. God in Christ still waits to be gracious: the God of all grace is ever ready to hear and to help. If we are of the number of those who do not cry, should not that very fact itself stir us up? God is near, why do we not cry? Our need is great, why do we not cry? God is full of mercy, and we are full of misery, why do we not cry?

Finally the Psalmist says, "Blot out my transgressions." All sin is marked : and that by God. We forget it, God does not. He knows each and all of the sins which we have committed from the moment of our birth downwards. A book of remembrance of them all is written before Him. This, therefore, is only the old cry repeated in a new form. As my sin is a foul wrong done against Thee and Thine, have mercy upon me. As it is written before Thee, blot it out. And the plea is, According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies. It is as if he had said, "O Lord, my sins are many and great, and much aggravated. But Thy mercies are a multitude : hast Thou not among all these mercies a mercy for me? Thou hast : there is forgiveness with Thee. Great as my sins are, the multitude of Thy mercies is so much greater that there is pardon for me, even for me also." Let us give good heed to this word, "blot out." It tells us that sin is so written before God as that nothing but the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can wash it out, and take it away.



VER. 2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.*

IN this verse there is again to be observed a marked difference between nature and grace. Grace fears sin; nature fears only, or chiefly, the punishment of sin. Grace fears the thing itself; nature fears only the effects and consequences of the thing. Grace teaches a man to fear and to hate sin as sin; sin, to a gracious man, is its own punishment. Nature, the natural man, the man who does not really believe in a God—the God, the living and true God,—that man loves sin as sin. He loves it with a growing love; he would have more, and ever more of it, did he not fear its effects here, and its punishment hereafter. He fears and hates only the consequences of sin in this life, and those in what may be the possibilities of the life to come. If a man steal, he ceases to be respectable. That is one punishment of theft which is sure and certain here, even in this life. So men who wish to be, or to be

thought to be, respectable, do not steal. They cannot afford to steal; the balance of the transaction would be all against them. The profit of the stealing would be more than absorbed by the loss of respectability. And so men of this stamp do not steal; they only covet in their hearts, and keep their respectability. Each sin is hedged round with punishment of various kinds. Men fear these punishments, and stand back. It is only the punishment, however, which they fear and hate. The sin they love. It may be that many sins, never having been indulged, have ceased to tempt very strongly. The one or two outlets for sin permit all the bitterness of the heart to flow freely out. Yet the seeds of all sin are in each heart: men love it; it is natural to us all; it comes kindly to us. Ye *must* be born again.

Grace, on the other hand, leads a man to fear sin; and, therefore, when he prays, it is *washing* he seeks. He feels himself to be unclean; he is, therefore, miserable; and so he cries, Wash me, wash me thoroughly; cleanse me, cleanse out these sin-stains; take away these sin-seeds that spring, and spread, and produce ever more. It is this sin, this

sin itself, which is death. Sin is to be away from God. It is to be out from the light of His life; it is to be away from the joy and peace of His love. Sin is putting the creature into the Creator's place; it is a dethroning of God, and an exalting of some idol to His place. It is to love death, that grim, bony skeleton; and hence it is hateful: and hence it is washing, thorough washing, which he seeks. And no washing but God's own cleansing will do. The fountain of cleansing is with God. With Thee is the fountain of life. It is the blood alone that can take away sin. It is only the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses us from all sin, or any sin. It is impossible for any other blood or any other thing to cleanse it away. Only an infinite God, through an infinite atonement, can do away the guilt of an infinite evil, which sin is. Sin is an infinite evil because it is committed against an infinite God. Hence this cry for blood-washing. Pardon the past; but, after the past is pardoned, the sin is still there,—there in my heart, budding and springing up afresh. Wash me therefore, O God, and make me clean. Pluck up, and cast out, these roots of bitterness that spring up and trouble me. Lay

the axe to the root of the tree ; cleanse me from my sins. It is not, Remit the punishment ; but, Cleanse out the sin.

And then it is “thoroughly,” root and branch. It is a radical cleansing he seeks ; and this, again, is grace, and grace as opposed to nature. Nature conserves the sin ; depress it, repress it, stop its consequences, if you will, but spare the thing. Let the right eye alone, though it does offend. Cut not off the right foot, though it does lead astray. Grace sees sin to be the evil, and it seeks to have that rooted out, down to the finest, smallest fibre of it. Root it out, therefore, though, in tearing it away, every muscle should crack, and every nerve tingle.

And it is “thoroughly,” because grace knows that sin is like a vile weed, which you can only kill by rooting it all out. Grace teaches that the smallest sin which is left living in the heart has in it the life of death, so to speak ; and, moreover, that the smallest sin, if left in the heart, will not long remain small ; it will grow and spread. The one unclean spirit will bring in seven other devils worse than himself. One sin leads to another. That like draws to like, is true here also. The heart is a



favourable seed-bed for sin. It must all go, or it will all grow. Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted must be rooted up and cast out. Wash me, and wash me thoroughly. Purge away my sin till it is all purged out. Spare me not when you are laying the rod on the back of my sin. Cut off the ready right hand. Let it forget its cunning, rather than sin should remain. Pluck out the bright and sparkling right eye. Let me grope my blinded way to Thee, rather than that I should go seeing and sinning down to the pit. Make thorough work. Spare not for my crying. Hold not Thy hand till the last and least of Thine enemies be trodden down and slain.

If we would be holy, this is the way. Without holiness no man shall see God. That is the law of the kingdom; there is no exception to that rule. Into that clean, holy home, there enters nothing that defileth. There is no royal road to holiness. This is the conflict to which we are called. We must not let sin alone, or it will not let us alone; we must either kill it, or it must kill us. This combat is to the death; there is no drawn battle here. One or other must yield and die. If thou

spare thy lusts, thy lusts will not spare thee. If thou be not their death in this world, they will be thy death in the world that is to come. There should be neither peace in sin, nor peace with sin. The battle-cry of every child of God is, War to the death against sin. "Thorough" is the motto; under that banner we fight. The least sin has death in the bosom of it, just as much as the greatest. A little sin will sink the soul down to the depths of the bottomless pit as effectually as the greatest. All sin is sin, and the wages of sin is death. Wash me thoroughly, O God, from each and all of my sins!

From all that we have thus found, three things in special should stand clearly out. The *first*, that whenever we sin, and whatever our sin may be, the remedy is a direct recourse to the grace and pardoning mercy of God. That should stand forth clear as the sun. Nothing should ever come between us and God. Even sin should not. And no argument should hinder us: no inducement should keep us back. The greatness of our sin should not; it cannot well be greater than murder and adultery combined within the same family. God has left us this

example to teach us this thing. That our sin is small is no reason whatever for staying away from God in the exercise of habitual faith, constant communion, and repeated prayer. That our sin is great is no better reason, unless we can clearly prove that the sin is more potent than the blood of Jesus. There is no sin so little that it can pass without pardon, and there is no sin so great that it cannot be pardoned. This being the case, we should let no excuse, no apology, no suggestion of the devil delay us one moment from God. Sin is a foul and a defiling thing. It eats in, and grasps its victim fast. Every hour that it continues in possession increases its power of holding. It is a deadly evil. It is a vile poison: it spreads rapidly, and takes possession of every vital part, and there it crowns itself king. There is only safety in speedy action. It should be cast out, and that right speedily. And that we may cast it out, we must go to God with it. That is the only refuge; there the only remedy. And it is madness to stay away from Him. You cannot weaken the sin by staying away from God. If you let a sin remain upon you, it will grow stronger and stronger every hour of your absence

from God. You can never put a stop to it without God's strength; you can never get it pardoned, or in any way obliterated, till you have come to God. Even sin which we have forsaken, but left unconfessed, and so unforgiven, lying as a blot on the conscience, if it is allowed to remain, and keep our soul from communion with God, then there is in it a canker that eats, a plague-spot that spreads, and will soon cause death. We ought to go to God so soon as we have found ourselves out in any sin, whether it be an act of omission or of commission. So soon as the younger son spoken of in our Lord's parable came to himself, he said, "I will arise, and go to my father;" and immediately it is added, "and he arose and came to his father." He said, and he did. He said, "I will arise," and he arose. And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.

And the lesson further reads that we must go to God alone: straight up to the footstool; and there to the power of the cleansing blood must we go. No prayers, no penitence, no priest will do. The blood, and the blood alone. I plead the death of Jesus. I say, "Lord, this sin is great, but Thy mercy

is greater. This sin deserves death, but that death it has received. If I have not died for this sin, then my Surety has." And pardon being thus found, the peace of God is found also.

The direction applies to saint and to sinner. An awakened sinner should flee straight to God. He should stop short of nothing; God alone can do him any good. "Preparation" does him no good; preparation only adds sin to sin. "Preparation" means, committing a little more sin before we go to God to get our sin pardoned. All that a man does, out of God and out of Christ, is sin; he should, therefore, flee at once to the refuge.

And to a saint of God the same rule applies. Christ is all in all. If you have fallen into any sin, then He who first brought you out of sin can alone deliver you now. Go straight to Him; He who pardoned you before will pardon you again.

The *second* thing that stands out clearly above all that we have said is this, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." David was a man whom you would have expected to stand: he was a public man; known as a saint through his whole kingdom; an established and confirmed be-

liever in God ; one who felt himself firm : and yet he fell, and fell into a fearful series of crimes. None of us knows the depth of sin that is in his heart till circumstances combine, and the temptation concentrates into a point. Had you told David a week before he fell of all the evil that his unbridled, unslain lust would work to himself and others, what answer would you have got? “Am I a dog, that I should do this great evil?”

If I were to tell my reader that each sin that David committed lies folded up, as the germ and plant in a seed, and all in his own heart, what answer would he return me? You have seen a field lie bleak and bare, and the red earth all barren, through the whole dreary weeks of winter, and during the cold, cutting east winds of early spring ; but the fostering shower quietly falls, the favouring, soft wind breathes its warm breath over that field, and the sun pours his vivifying beams down upon it, and, lo, it is covered with verdure! No seed has been sown there. The roots and seeds of the rank, noxious weeds were all safely buried there; only they were not dead. Up they spring in rank, unwholesome growth, and sow themselves again far and wide.

This is a picture of the heart of man. So do sins spring and spread when opportunity offers and circumstances favour. Out of the heart come murders, and adulteries, and thefts, and all other sins. The late Rev. R. M. M'Cheyne, who knew well the state of his own heart, wrote thus: "I am tempted to think that I am now an established Christian, that I have overcome this or that lust so long that I have got into the habit of the opposite grace, so that there is no fear; I may venture very near the temptation, nearer than other men. This is a lie of Satan. I might as well speak of gunpowder getting by habit a power of resisting fire, so as not to catch the spark. As long as powder is wet, it resists the spark; but when it becomes dry, it is ready to explode at the first touch. As long as the Spirit dwells in my heart, He deadens me to sin, so that, if lawfully called through temptation, I may reckon upon God carrying me through. But when the Spirit leaves me, I am like dry gunpowder. Oh for a sense of this!

"I am tempted to think that there are some sins for which I have no natural taste, such as strong drink, profane language, &c., so that I need not fear



temptation to such sins. This is a lie, a proud, presumptuous lie! The seeds of all sins are in my heart, and, perhaps, all the more dangerously that I do not see them. . . . I am helpless in respect of every lust that ever was, or ever will be, in the human heart. I am a worm,—a beast before God. I often tremble to think that all this is true. My only safety is to know, and feel, and confess my helplessness, that I may hang upon the arm of Omnipotence. I should study those sins in which I am most helpless: in which passion becomes like a whirlwind, and I like a straw. No figure of speech can represent my utter want of power to resist the torrent of sin. I ought to study Christ's omnipotence more. Heb. vii. 25, &c., and such scriptures, should be ever before me." Let him that *thinketh* he standeth take heed lest he fall.\*

The *third* thing notable is this—David was a

\* "When the old man hath broken into pieces, and we feel ourselves murderers, adulterers, thieves, liars, in the sight of God, then shall we come to use, and thank God that we have at hand, the penitential psalms of David—the confessions, the groanings, the languishings of the desolate king of Israel. It booteth not that we have not committed the acts; we wanted power, we



great king ; a great favourite with God also. He had peculiar promises, and peculiar privileges ; but he mentions none of these. He stands on the common ground ; he pleads the common plea ; he seeks to be made a partaker of the common salvation. Sin is the great leveller. It makes the king and the beggar equal before God. There is no difference here. Royal robes will not shelter a king ; rotten rags will not screen the beggar. God will render to every man according to his deeds, for there is no respect of persons with God. For what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law : that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

If David had to stand on this common ground, and cry the bitter cry of the condemned, who will dare to plead privilege before the Judge of the whole earth ? If there was no remedy for this royal sin-

wanted opportunity, we wanted means ; but ah ! we wanted not will. It was in our heart, out of which proceed murders, adulteries, theft, false witness. It hath been all the while in our heart, and we knew it not. It was rooted there, and we fostered it ; ay, and it will cause us bitter groans ere it will leave the place of its roots."—*Edward Irving.*

ner, other than the blood of Christ, how shall *we* escape if we neglect so great salvation? David knew but one way of escape ; he sought pardon only in one way. Let us follow his faith, that we may reap his reward.

VER. 3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

HE pleads guilty. He seems to have known this New Testament text: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." This is one of his arguments for pardon. "I confess, I acknowledge my sins in all their fulness; I do not seek to cloak nor cover them; I do not seek to hide either them or myself from Thee." Here is another difference between nature and grace. Grace leads a man to confess his sins to God; nature hides them, extenuates them. Nature denies them, makes them less, finds apology and excuse for them. Adam and his wife hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden: "I heard thy voice; I was afraid; and I hid myself." Fig-leaves, or the trees of the garden; any shallow shelter, any screen or hiding-place. Sometimes nature casts its sins on God: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she did give unto me, and I did eat." It was

the woman's fault, and she was Thy gift. The thing formed says to Him that formed it,—the clay to the potter,—Why hast Thou formed me thus? “I knew thee to be an austere man.” “And he, willing to justify himself, said—” This is ever nature's way. But grace says, “I acknowledge my transgressions.” Grace has its hand to its mouth, and is ever ready with the public profession of what it inwardly feels: “Unclean, unclean.” Unbelief says, “Lord, I thank thee that I am not so bad as other men,—this publican here, for example; Lord, I thank thee that I am not as he.” Faith makes no comparison: it sees no holy Pharisee standing by: it has no sight for other than God, who is so holy above, and I, who am so sinful here below; and so it only cries, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” And then, this is its plea: “‘I acknowledge my transgressions;’ I confess my sins. I know little beyond this, that I am a great sinner, and that God is a great Saviour; that my part is confession, and God's part is pardon; for if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

See how close and near we are to pardon; and

yet few trouble themselves so much as to seek it, fewer still to take it. All that we have to do is to make confession. We have but to come down, like Zaccheus, from the high tree where we sit concealed, and cry, Mercy! All the rest is God's. "There is forgiveness with Thee." It is wholly in God's power. How near every man is to pardon, this very day, through the merits and death, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ! But how little heed do men give in regard to all matters that concern their souls! Men do not think pardon worth the having; they do not think it worth the taking. God has brought it near; it is at the door; it is within reach of every man's hand: and yet who hath believed our report? This is one of the ways in which men's unbelief comes out. Men do not believe God. Unconverted men are practically Atheists. They will write you a book to prove the being and display the attributes of God, and yet be practically Atheists all the while. Men do not believe that there is a God who is holy, and hates sin, and will cast sinners into hell. They do not believe that; nor do they believe that they are condemned already, and that the wrath of God abideth upon them. And, not believing that, they

do not interest themselves in regard to God's method of mercy. They do not know nor believe that pardon of sin is to be had for the asking, and may be got for the taking. Unconverted men do not practically believe these things, but plod on in cold indifference. Your story falls upon a dull, dead ear when you tell it. The eye stares on you with a lack of lustre which says that the soul's energies are elsewhere. And then, when the mind is thus trained, and the heart thus grows old,—when men, aroused by the footsteps of death coming near to summon them to their doom, begin in real earnest to seek God, they often find the task become hopeless. I stood once beside the deathbed of a man who had led a decent, moral, but utterly godless life. He was a stranger to me; but he sent for me, and I went. I sought to see him alone, and, by the replies I got to a few questions which I put, soon saw his state of mind. I explained to him the nature of the gospel as well as I could, making use of all the simplest, shortest illustrations I could find, and then tried to enforce it on his acceptance. It was a heavy task,—a heavy task to us both; for the man's ear was growing dull, his mind weak and feeble, and

he was suffering almost constant pain. I urged him, at last, as the simplest thing I could say, to look, only to look, unto Jesus, and be saved. I saw his lips move, and leant over him to catch the words. "I know neither where nor how to look." After a pause, "To me, a look is a look in the dark." I tried all I could try, knelt down and commended him to the loving-kindness and tender mercy of our God, departed, and saw him no more.

Confession of sin is no easy work. It is hard work for a strong, hale, healthy, hearty man. It is work for a day of grace, and life, and health; it is not work for a day of death. It implies conviction, and contrition, and conversion. It is not a mere ramble of words, in a set form of speech. It is the heart, feeling sin and its guilt before God; loathing the touch of the hateful thing, as the very pollution of the soul: and it is a lowly, shamefaced acknowledgment of all this evil as done against God. It is not work for a sick man at all. It needs strength of body as well as of mind. When the body is weak and wasted, it communicates its condition to the soul. And in a state of bodily prostration, real confession of sin becomes nearly

impossible. It is a cruel shame to both body and soul, to God and to man, to put it off till a day of weakness,—a day that may never come, even were it a fitting day. It is no easy matter. “For my part,” says Bunyan, “I find it no easy matter to confess sin unto God. It would seem as if the whole heaven were brass, and the earth iron beneath my feet. I often can do little more, when oppressed with a sense of my sinfulness before God, than roll in the dust, and cry out, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’”

“My sin is ever before me.” This again is the saying of grace. Nature might say with truth, My sin, as sin, is never before me. But this is the cry of grace. It is God’s object to produce this feeling ; it is His desire to see us remembering our sin, for then He forgets it. It is when we remember our sin that God forgets it : when we begin to forget our sin, God begins to call it to remembrance. Sin must be remembered some way, either by God or us. The remembrance of sin makes a believer go softly all his days. At death he forgets it, and God forgets it for ever.

Sin, as sin,—sin, as a breach of the pure and per-



fectly holy law of God,—is never before the natural heart of man. When a natural man sees sin, it is not as sin, sin against God, but with reference simply to some of its evil consequences on himself or others, or on society, and its reflex influence thence back on himself. An unconverted man tries to forget sin, as sin. He tries to remember and enjoy that which pleased him in the doing of it; but he hates to be reminded of it as an offence to the holy God. That is a thought which is soon cast out, if it does intrude itself upon him.

“My *sin* is ever before me.” It is sin, as sin,—not its punishment here nor hereafter,—not simply any of its evil consequences; but sin, the sin against God, the daring impiety of my breaking the good and holy law of this living, loving God. What is ever before me is, my sense of shame, my feeling of guilt in being a law-breaker: it is a hateful thing; I have shut myself out from the society and fellowship of all the good and holy ones; I am unclean, and deserve to be separated. The man cannot forget that.

You have seen the thing in the face of a thief, as he passed along the street, on his way to jail, in the

grasp of the officers of justice. You have seen him strive to hide the handcuffs on his wrist, as he looked into the face of an honest man. He is shut out from men now,—separated from them by doors, and bars, and bolts of iron ; he is glad to be alone,—alone for a while ; but the sin comes up, comes back : it is the cause of the separation.

The quickened conscience feels somewhat in this way. It is detected. “Thou God seest me.” It is in the grasp of God’s justice. That iron hand rests on the shoulder of guilt everywhere. It is found out ; God is looking at that sin, and I cannot get my eyes dragged off it : “my sin is ever before me.” God is thinking of it, and I cannot get rid of it, even if I would.

It is this feeling that prompts the cry that we have in the first verse. “Mercy, O God, mercy. ‘I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me.’ It haunts me, as the last look of the murdered man follows the murderer. It is ever before me, night and day. I have no more peace in my sin, no more peace at all : can never find peace again, unless I find it in Thee, unless Thou movest Thy hand. I appeal to Thy pity ; I appeal to Thy

tender heart; I appeal to Thy loving-kindness. 'Have mercy upon me, O God.' Blot out, blot out this sin of mine, which is ever before me. Take away this plague-spot from me, which burns as it lies, scalding its way in to the very centre of my being. Blot it out: hide Thy face from it, for it is ever before me. Have mercy on the poor workmanship of Thine own hands, tortured with this ever-present burden: come and take it away; Thou only canst: Thou only canst lay this haunting ghost that follows me everywhere, and looks on me by day as well as by night." It is this feeling that prompts the cry. This thought was in his heart before he began. It was this presence of his sin, a hateful and a loathsome thing, that first brought him to his knees. His first cry is for mercy; for this sin is ever before him.

There are just two ways of it. Sin must be remembered by some one somewhere, either now or hereafter, either in this life or the next. Sin cannot be easily forgotten, nor easily got rid of. In this life it is possible: in the next it cannot be. Sin cannot be easily got rid of even here, and now. If it is easy to us, it is simply because it was the reverse of easy to

our Substitute. It required the bloody agony and the bloody death of the Lord Jesus to make an end of His people's sin, and to finish their transgression. They have it ever before them now as a forgiven thing, but still before them. It is a faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am the chief : my sin is ever before me. John Newton never forgot, to the last of his days, that he was only the old African blasphemer. They see it : they have it ever before them, here and now, till God pardons and passes it by ; says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee ;" gives them no more conscience of sin ; makes them to see it laid on Jesus, as by Him carried, and carried away ; as by Him fully expiated, and finally atoned. Then there is a sense in which the very memory of it passes away. It is carried into the wilderness. God casts it into the depths of the sea ; He turns His back upon it. It is dead and buried in Christ : it is left behind Him in His open grave. Come and see the place where the Lord lay : behold ! your sin is left there. God hath made Him who knew no sin, sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Thus may sin be made an

end of, and everlasting righteousness brought in. Thus may our sin be ever before us, and yet behind God : remembered by us, forgotten by Him ; both forgiven and forgotten ; and so our hearts filled with the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

But there is another way. Men may enjoy their sin. They may go on committing sin, and devising new methods of making it sweeter, more pleasant and lasting ; they may try every expedient for making the memory of it, *as sin*, pass away from them ; they may steadily refuse to look upon their conduct as habitually offensive to God, and their state as one of chronic rebellion against Him ; they may dress it up, and make its haggard, skeleton form beautiful for a season with the rosy blush and bloom of youth ; they may sing songs, and shout, and dance, and be merry over it ; they may conceal its hideous shape under fair, fine names ; they may turn it into poetry, and in that way may sing it forth in soft, sweet, gently-flowing music ; they may hide all that is offensive about it from their own hearts, as men plant flowers over graves, and daub mortar over unsightly, dead walls ; they may sear and harden their consciences to it, by habitual hiding of

the truth from their own selves ; they may refuse fairly to face it, and to hear the voice of God so piercingly loud about it : all this they may do, and more, and continue to do it all for a time, longer or shorter ; it is a question of years at most ; but let them not, in addition to all this wickedness, folly, and madness, add to it all the dire insanity of thinking that this state of things will abide for ever, will abide for long. They can hardly get to the end of the first stage of their journey to eternity with their eyes shut. Something may waken the sleeping giant any day. Some touch on a vital part may cause the seared conscience to thrill, and vibrate, and send shocks of agony in constant succession to your bruised and broken heart. A stray arrow from the bow of God, drawn by some soldier of the Cross at a venture, may pierce the crevice of your harness of proof. A word fitly spoken may open out all memory's stored-up treasures. Some sharp and sudden twinge of pain, some sweeping whirlwind of the wrath of the Lord, black and terrible, may hurry down and settle over you ; may burst and break upon you ; may hurl out its rattling thunders, and flash its lightnings full in your face,

and make the very heart within you shake, and faint, and fail, and grow feeble as water: then you will know what sin is, and what it is to have it ever before you. The calm sea once set in motion, how the waves, great and mighty, do tumble and roar, rush, and rise, and swell! Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men. Do you think that God does not see your sin because you refuse to let your eye rest upon it? Do you think that God's Word is a cunningly-devised fable?

But suppose that all this may not be so, and that the man goes right on, dead in trespasses and sin, to the very close. Suppose that God has said, "Let him alone." Is it any better for a man to go sleeping into the second death? Suppose that death, the death of the body, comes and goes, passes over you and leaves you stiff, and cold, and ready for the coffin, and the grave, and the dust and ashes of the sepulchre; then comes the end. And now the first thought may be, My sin is ever before me; before me for ever. What terrible depths of meaning these few words convey! My sin is there; and there for ever; and there without relief and without remedy. There is no mercy to be had now: no



pardon for it now : no blood of cleansing to wash it out now. The fountain which God opened for sin and uncleanness is now past my reach, and there is no blood accessible now but my own, which can never, never wash it away. During life all remedies were pushed away ; during life you shut it out, and kept it out, as sin ; and now, like waters long pent up, it rushes in upon you with relentless, resistless force, and overwhelms you as with a flood of wrath and vengeance. Your sin is there, ever before you. It touches you ; looks in upon you at every pore ; holds you ; takes possession of you within and without, above and below, and all round about ; time without end, ever before you. Regrets are all vain ; repentance is all vain ; even remorse is all vain. The worm never dies ; the fire is never quenched : for my sin is ever before me.

Is this too terrible a picture ? Is it a picture at all ? Is it not a few dim touches of a stern, dread reality ? Picture ! These are no pictures. We live in a world of pictures. Sinners dwell among pictures, feed upon pictures, live upon pictures. It is time they had something more real. There are no pictures here. Sin is no picture. God is no picture.



Wrath is no picture. Hell is no picture. Death, that grim, cold, grisly skeleton, is no picture; and yet real, and grim, and cold as he is, there is a more true and terrible reality than even he. Listen to this: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to his works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." This again is the second death. These are the things that are to be hereafter. They are pictures now; but they are pictures of future realities. These are the things that are to be when the pictures have all vanished. These are the things which are to be if God is, and is to be, and is to remain what He is: the God of truth who cannot lie. We cannot too soon translate them out of the picture-region and make real facts of them.

What is the lesson that comes from all this? Here is one lesson from an old divine: "Whosoever would have mercy and pardon of his sin from God, must acknowledge his sin and debt, and must take

part with God and with justice against himself; because the Psalmist here giveth this for a reason of his hope of pardon, 'for I acknowledge my transgression.' ” And surely this may be another lesson : Let us not forget our sins, lest God remember them against us. Let us keep our sin ever before us as pardoned, as forgiven, that we may learn to avoid it, to hate it, to mortify it, to use it as an ever new motive for fresh faith and love, for fresh pains, and patience, and prayers, and labours unwearied. Let us have no unsettled sin to stand forth against us in the judgment. Mercy, yea, tender mercy is near, and it is near in magnitude greater than even our sin. Let us, therefore, see to it, that we ever go to the blood of Christ, there to be washed and forgiven.

Let me add a morsel more from the same old dim and dusty page : “ Sin, as it bindeth a man over to punishment till he be forgiven, so it defileth a man, and puts an abominable deformity on him, which his illuminate conscience cannot look upon without loathing, till by pardon and purging it be washed away. The pollution of sin goeth through the whole powers of the soul and body which have been serviceable to it ; through mind, will, affections, senses

bodily, and all; and nothing can quiet the soul here except it find pardoning mercy, and sanctifying mercy going after all the foul footsteps of sin, and doing away all the filthiness thereof."

Surely, for another thing, it is better to acknowledge our transgressions, where this acknowledgment brings pardon, than to be crying out, "Unclean, unclean," through all eternity, where he that is filthy must be filthy still. And surely it is better, beyond all measure of comparison, to have our sin ever before us for the few brief days of our pilgrimage, than to die in our sins, and to have sin for our constant companion for evermore. Here, that mercy of God which endureth for ever is within our reach: now it may be had for the asking; for he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

One other thing. This man speaks of *my* sin. We have sharp eyes for the sins of others; would that we had as clear vision for our own sins! Our own sins ought to concern us first and most. "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother,

Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye ; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." These are the words of the Lord Jesus. "*My* sin is ever before me." If we had our own sin ever before us, we should not have so much time to spare to spy out the faults of our brother. If we were busier with our own beam, we should have less time to spare for our brother's mote. Men who see their own sins the least, often see the sins of others the sharpest. And they who have most toleration for their own sin have often the very least pity to shew for the faults and failings of other men. "*My* sin" should ever be the beginning and the burden of our prayer. The best way to learn to pray for and pity others, is to pray for the pardon of our own sins, and be our own selves made partakers of the pity of God. Freely ye have received, freely give. He who hath received much mercy usually sheweth much mercy. He loves to bestow mercy on others who has tasted how sweet God's mercy is for himself.

VER. 4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

STILL the cry is continued—"I have sinned, and against thee ; yea, against thee only." This is grace, for it is faith. Faith brings near the far, and removes the near to a distance. The three children, when they stood on the plain of Dura, saw a golden god ; they heard the command of the king to fall down and worship ; they knew that obedience would be rewarded ; and, visibly before them, there was the furnace, heated to a white heat, prepared and ready for the disobedient. All this visible show of things faith removed. It took away the near ; it brought near the far. It took away the gold god ; it brought near the only living and true God. It took away the commandment of the earthly king to fall down and worship at the trumpet's sound ; it brought near the command of God, "Thou shalt not

bow down to them, nor serve them." It took away that fierce fire, whose heated rays were actually playing on their flesh ; and it brought near that far-off and unseen fire which is never quenched, into which all idolaters shall be cast. Faith is the substance of things hoped for ; it is the evidence of things not seen as yet.

It is thus that faith acts here. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Faith removes the near. It takes away the friends, neighbours, subjects, servants, against each and all of whom the king had sinned ; and it brings near the far, that God who, during his continuance in sin, had been far from all his thoughts. We think nothing of God, with a serious thought, while we are sinning ; it is during repentance that God is great.

The men who drew up our legal forms prove that they thoroughly understood the nature of sin. I am told that this still stands part of the bill of indictment brought in against a prisoner on a criminal charge : that he, the prisoner there at the bar, *not having the fear of God before his eyes*, did so and so. And that is just precisely the history of the matter. If a man had had, and kept,

the fear of God before his eyes, then he could not have gone into that sin. Faith was wanting; and therefore there was no fear of God *before his eyes*, and therefore he walked blindly on in a career of sin.

There is a sense in which this self-accusation of the Psalmist is not true. David had sinned against others besides God. He had sinned against this woman; against the child that was born to them of their adultery; against the woman's husband, whom he, in a way the most cunning and cowardly, foully did to the death; against every inhabitant of the whole land did this king sin; against every home and hearth, at whose sanctity he had dealt a heavy blow; against his own household, and every member of it; and against his own body had he sinned. The thing was not done in a corner. It had got whispered abroad at first; but now it was fully known. There was not a cottage, however mean, in the whole land where the king's sin was not spoken of with bated breath; and yet he says, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." The stars are bright and beautiful, and shine clear and full in the darkest night; but, when the



sun rises, the darkness flees away, and the golden stars are seen no more. They are all hid ; they all grow dim, and dark, and die out by reason of the superior brightness of the glory of that sun that excelleth in strength. They are all still there, and they still shine as brightly as ever they shone ; but they are seen no more. The sun in his beauty rules the day, and takes to himself all the glory. This is David's meaning here. He has not forgotten that his sin is sin against the sons of men. But the great thought of God fills his whole heart. He has eyes for none but God : Thou God seest me ; seest me as distinctly, and hast me as vividly before Thee, as if Thou hadst none but me to think about, as if Thou sawest me only ; and therefore I see Thee as if I saw Thee alone : " against thee, thee only, have I sinned."

Oh, it is not little that I have sinned against this wretched woman, and slain her poor husband, and brought disgrace on myself throughout my whole kingdom. All this is great, but it is all as nothing when I think of Thee : " Against thee, thee only, have I sinned."

Yonder man towers high above the insect that



crawls beneath his feet : that turret's lofty top smiles down upon the man : and yon tall cliff dwarfs them all ; and yet from its top you can look high to that Alpine summit which cuts clear into heaven's azure blue. But heaven itself ! Look in to yon great, arched deep ; and earth, and all its heights, dwindle down to a mere speck in your thoughts. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned."

And yet, after all, this is but the simple, literal fact of the case. "I, David, have sinned against my own people. I have sinned against a whole family, and so against the sanctity, and the stability, and the security of all the families in the land. I have sinned against mine own soul, and against mine own body. But all this sin, all these sins, run up into this one thing—sin against Thee. My sin against myself is sin against Thee only. It is only sin against me, because it is sin against Thee." Any wrong we do, whether to ourselves or others, is done to God. God means to provide for each of us the perfection of peace and blessedness. These, He knows, can only be had in one way. It is only in the keeping of God's commandments that man can be not only truly happy, but happy at all. So soon,

therefore, as we have gone out of the way of God's commandments, were it only by a hairbreadth, we have gone out of the way of peace and happiness ; and are, to that extent, on the way of misery. Our misery is a wrong done to God. It is a libel on His wise government. Why should misery be found under Him ? Besides, it is God that constitutes all these relations of life, and He regards Himself as the supreme Guardian of them all. To sin against any of them is, therefore, to sin expressly and directly against Him. Wherever our sin begins, it all ends here—"Against thee, thee only."

It is a mark of genuine repentance, of that repentance which needeth not to be repented of, that it is evoked by the thought of God. There is a repentance that is only caused by man. With man it begins ; with man it ends. The false is often mistaken for the true. But think ; what caused your repentance ? How, and when, did your repentance first arise ? Was it from man or God ? Was it the fact of man's discovery, or of God's discovery of your sin, that first troubled you ? Was it because you heard the hum of scorn, the hiss of reproach and contempt arise from among men, and you knew that men had

found you out, and that your disgrace was buzzed abroad? Was it then that your heart first began to throb, and your cheek to flush with shame, and you abhorred yourself and repented? Was it all your trouble that the cloak you had so long skilfully worn was torn aside, and you stood disclosed in your true colours before all men who cared to know what you are, and what you were? And did it end there? When the tongue of man was hushed into its former silence, did your peace return?

Or, was it because solemn thoughts of God entered your mind? You saw His goodness, grace, and mercy to be very great, and knew and felt that you had sinned against them all; did you feel that His eye had been on you, and that He knew you altogether? Was this the root of your repentance: was this the source of your bitter tears?

There is lingering love to God that comes out in this expression. There is love for the God against whom he has sinned. "Against thee; thee only." "My Father, I have sinned against Thee. I have sinned against Thy love; against Thy great kindness, and grace, and manifold mercies. Thou never didst anything but good to me. Thou hast fed and filled

me ; Thou hast kept and clothed me all the days of my life : and yet I have sinned against Thee, against Thee only. I have no friend like Thee ; no friend, in truth, but Thee ; by Thy bounty I have come from the shepherd's crook to the king's sceptre ; Thou hast done me nothing but good ; I owe all I have, and am, to Thee : and yet against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." This is a bitter cry. This is a weary wail of woe. Besides, "I have done this evil in Thy sight. A thousand eyes may have seen, ten thousand men may have known ; but it is against Thee, Thee only, that I have sinned ; and it is in Thy sight that I have done this evil." All evil is done in God's sight. This is a truth that is forgotten of man ; by some it is denied ; by most it is lightly esteemed : but the denial or forgetting of a fact does not change it. A truth remains true after it is denied. A fact remains such, and submits, for a time, to be treated precisely as you will. Let men treat it how they may, it still remains a true thing that God sees all their sin, whether it be committed in the secresies of their own breast, under cover of the darkness, or in broad, open day. "Thou God seest me," is true of every one, everywhere, and always.

This is an aggravation of sin, that God sees it in the act; that it is done in His sight. We speak of the kind of sin that is so aggravated, with a sort of wonder. We add, when telling the story of another's guilt—"And what is worst, he did it all before my very eyes; the transaction was the most shameless conceivable: he did not seem so much as to care that my very eye was on him all the while." So we speak sometimes. There are sins done against us which do give rise to such complaints. Sometimes a little child will provoke us so; sometimes it is an old, hardened sinner that does it. But all sin against God is done in God's sight. Each one of our sins has this aggravation. He says of an action, "Thou shalt not do this;" and before His very eyes, practically, we say, "I shall;" and we do it, and do it while God is actually looking at us. This I say is a fearful aggravation of all sin, of any sin. If a sin were little in itself, this one aggravation of it would be quite enough to make it great. It is for this purpose that the Psalmist quotes it here. He is not seeking to extenuate his sin; he is confessing it, and in confessing it, he brings out one of those features which go

far to aggravate it. It is as if he had said, "I have done this evil in Thy sight, O God! I was so lost to all sense of shame, and proceeded to such daring lengths in impiety, that, with Thine eye upon me, I did this thing." "If we *confess* our sins:" and to confess sin aright, we must know it. To know sin we must look at it apart from men's thoughts and words about it. We must look at it in the light of God's holy law; in the light which the whole Bible throws upon it; in the light which the holiness of heaven, and the hatred of hell, throw upon it. To know sin aright, we must see it in the light of the great white throne, when the judgment is set, and the books are opened. Above all, we must bring it out into the shade; we must go down to the midnight garden of Gethsemane, and up to the mid-day darkness of the cross on Calvary. When we have looked at sin thus, all round, and from all these points of view, we shall know it better, and so be able to confess it better; and if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

To the prophet Nathan, David says, (2 Sam. xii. 13,) "I have sinned against the Lord;" to God

himself, David says, "I have sinned against thee, thee only." Nathan asks him, (ver. 9,) "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" David replies, "I have done this evil in thy sight." What an encouragement for a minister to be found faithful, and to commend himself to every man's conscience by the manifestation of the truth! When the simple truth of God is placed clearly before a man's conscience, that truth lays hold of the conscience, and the conscience lays hold of the truth; they cannot easily be separated: the truth works on the conscience, and the conscience works on the truth; repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is the result; and all finally ends in the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Finally, as it is against God alone that all sin is committed, so it is from God alone that we are to look for the pardon of our sin. Mercy is God's distinguishing attribute. This is a glory He will not give to another. They who pretend to dispense pardon as for God, and from God, rob Him of His glory.

Of the last clause of this verse, we have an in-



spired version in the Greek of the New Testament. Paul quotes it in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. In the fourth verse of that chapter, he asserts this as a general principle, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." That is, It is a first principle in all reasoning that God is the standard of truth, is *the* truth. At whatever hazards this must stand. Whatever be the consequence that follows upon this, it is to be unhesitatingly accepted. Then he quotes from this psalm, by way of illustration of this clear principle, "That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." All that Thou sayest is Yea and Amen. When Thou speakest, be just; let all the earth be silent. When Thou art judged, when Thy decisions are examined, let every man acknowledge that Thou hast done rightly, justly, righteously.

The literal rendering of the Hebrew is this, "That thou mayest be justified in thy speaking; mightest be pure in thy judging,"—*i.e.*, "mightest be adjudged to be pure, held to be guiltless, or faultless." He who, in a judicial contest, was adjudged to be clear, pure, or guiltless, was of course the victor; and on this account, the apostle's transla-



tion, "mightest overcome," is a translation of the Hebrew according to its meaning, though not a literal version. Again, the Hebrew reads in the last clause, "Thou mayest be clear, or pure, in thy judging;" or "in the judgment of thee,"—*i.e.*, when thou art judged." The apostle's version is therefore clearly in accordance with the Hebrew words, and the sense which he brings out of it *must* be the mind of the Spirit of God, who inspired equally David and Paul. And that meaning is this, "In pronouncing sentence of condemnation on men, thou art to be justified; and if thou art called in question for this, thou wilt prove to be victor, or come off clear in the contest."

The sense of the verse in the psalm is thus manifest. David acknowledges his sin so fully; seeks to offer no extenuation; takes so completely God's estimate of it; acknowledges his whole guilt so unreservedly; stands so utterly prostrate and helpless in soul before God; owns so entirely his full deserving of wrath, that God has but to speak, and he will be silent. "It is right; it is well. I see it all now: the holy, purely perfect God on the one side; and myself, a guilty, helpless worm, on the other. Thou

wilt be justified in Thy words. Judge me, and my judgment of Thy sentence is, that it is right, whatever it be. It is a hard sentence Thou hast uttered against sin ; but therein Thou art clear. I say nothing, simply because I have nothing to say. I lay my hand upon my mouth, and am dumb before Thee."

There is a true sense of sin brought out here. This penitent stands self-convicted, and self-condemned, before God. So far from seeking to excuse himself or to find out any apology, he is altogether on God's side, and altogether against himself. He gives up his own cause as hopelessly lost ; and more, he takes the side of God's offended justice against himself. Speak, and Thou art justified : condemn, | and Thou art clear and pure.

Is it thus that we see our sin, feel it, confess it ? Is it man, or God, that troubles us concerning our sin ? Does our grief arise from the fact that God sees : or is it only caused by the knowledge that man sees ? Are we troubled because God has found us out : or is it only because man has found us out ? It is a dreadful thing to be found out by men. It is a dreadful thing for a masked man, who has up to a certain

point borne a name free from reproach among men, to be all at once stript bare, and know that his whole secret is out. It is dreadful to have, in one hour, the character of a whole lifetime go to pieces in his hands ; to be bereft of every covering, and have to stand forth before his fellow men in his own true colours. It is dreadful for this man to hear the rising murmur of disapprobation, the hum of wrath, the hiss of scorn ; his name a reproach passing from man to man, and mouth to mouth ; and to feel that it is all deserved. It is dreadful to have to face honest men with all your guilt revealed, and that guilt staring back upon you from every eye you meet. All these things are dreadful indeed. But they are all only shadows of the true feeling of that sort which is caused by our knowledge that God's eye is on our sin, and that we are summoned into His presence to answer for it, to speak with Him about it. One can imagine the feeling of a man who feels, for the first time, the grasp of the officers of justice on his shoulder, the hard, cold iron around his wrists. But to be called guilty by God ; to have the great eye upon you ; and all the world looking on ! It comes once in every man's history, and

properly only once. It comes either here or hereafter. It comes soon. In sixty years, at about the furthest, you can say with all but absolute certainty, it will have come to every man you know. If it comes in this world, and leads us to habitual repentance, habitual confession, and habitual faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is well, oh, 'how well !

But if it does not come in this world, then it is sure to come in the next world, and never to end at all, but be a misery, and a wretchedness, and a woe for evermore. It is sure to come. That sinking, sinking, down, and still down-sinking of the heart because of sin, sin exposed, sin shewn in all its hideous deformity, is sure to come, either in this world or the next. If it comes not here, but comes in the next world, it is of all things the most dreadful and terrible. It is the sum of all misery. It is the substance of all sorrow, and anguish, and agony of spirit. Think of this, "They shall waken up to shame and everlasting contempt." Shame on their own part, contempt on the part of all others. Contempt is dreadful. Everlasting contempt is surely the sum of all wretchedness, and misery, and woe ! O reader, make sure that thou art not the man.

Make sure of it by confession, and contrition, and lowly penitence before God. Go to Him, and take the words of this blessed psalm in your mouth: say, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned. So have mercy on me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness."

There is one thing more that needs to be said before leaving this verse. The Psalmist confesses his sins in particular. He says, "I have done *this* evil in thy sight." The word "this" is put in italics by our translators: that method of printing usually denotes that there is no corresponding word in the original. In this instance, however, the translators have been over-careful. The article accompanies the noun in the Hebrew, and makes the word *evil* emphatic. The meaning clearly is as we have it in our version. The Psalmist evidently has before him this special sin. It is no vague, general confession of sin indefinitely, which, when analysed, means in substance no sin at all. He has distinctly before his mind this whole guilty transaction, "*the* evil." I have done this accursed thing, and in Thy sight.

This is true confession, real penitence. Genuine

repentance fastens on a particular sin. It deals with it : it is on the conscience ; between that and God. God is looking at that sin on the one side, and I am looking at it on the other. There is too much indefinite confession among us. Our thoughts dwell on no particular sin. We do not bring out our guilt in any particular transaction before God. This should be constantly kept in view. We should think of our sins as sins : we should think of them as done and remaining in the sight of God, as seen by Him, as hated by Him, as giving rise to a controversy between us and God. This particular act of disobedience, and that : this neglect of duty, and that : each of them, as well as all of them, should be brought clearly into view, and we should not rest satisfied without the assurance that the blood of Christ has been applied to that particular sin, and so that it has been washed away. When a man goes to a physician, he is not satisfied with telling him that he is sick. He must come to particulars. He must tell the precise seat of the pain, and describe all its symptoms. Then only can a physician prescribe accurately. And even so must we go to the great Physician, and say as David said,

“Lord, I have done this evil, and this, in Thy sight : have mercy upon me, O God : wash me thoroughly from this sin, and blot out this, and all mine iniquities.” \*

\* I add a few of the better interpretations of this verse :—

“It does not mean, *to the end* ‘that thou mightest be justified ;’ but, *so that* ‘thou shalt be justified when thou speakest.’ It denotes the event which would follow from the confession he had made—the effect on his own mind, and which must also be produced in the minds of all who duly considered the case.”—*Lectures on the 51st Psalm, delivered in the parish church of St James', Bristol, by the Rev. Thos. T. Biddulph, A.M.* London, 1830.

“For these reasons I justify Thee, O God, in all that Thou hast spoken by Thy prophet (Nathan) : I submit to all Thy afflictive dispensations toward me, as the just desert of my transgressions against Thee : and though I myself am the subject of Thy punishment, I testify that Thou, Lord, art righteous in all Thy ways, and holy in all Thy works.”—*The Portraiture of the Christian Penitent, attempted in a Course of Sermons upon Psalm li., &c., by the Rev. Charles De Coetlogon, A.M.* Second Edition, 2 vols., London, 1776.

“I acknowledge my transgressions and accuse myself in this manner, that I may justify Thee, and give glory unto Thee ; and acknowledge Thy righteousness both in that which Thou hast spoken and threatened against me by Thy servant, Nathan, and in those judgments also which Thou hast already executed upon me, in taking away my child, and which Thou shalt also hereafter be pleased to lay upon me for my sin.” Again—“So that you see there be two parts of this reason why David doth thus confess his sins,—1. that God might be justified in whatsoever He had spoken ; 2. that God might be cleared in the judgments He had already, or should further execute upon him.”—CLII. *Lectures upon Psalm li., preached at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, in Leices-*



*tershire,\* by that late faithful and worthy minister of Jesus Christ, Mr Arthur Hildersham. London, 1635.*

“As if he had said, I confess the evil that I have done, not so much for mine own sake, as for Thy glory, *that thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest,—i. e., in all which thou speakest by Nathan when he reproved me, and denounced the sore afflictions which should come upon me; and be clear when thou judgest,—i. e., when Thou dost bring the judgment upon me which Thou hast threatened.*” He says—“David had not feared to do that in the sight of the Lord which he was very careful to hide from the eye of man.”—*Annotations upon the Five Books immediately following the Historical Parts of the Old Testament, &c., by Arthur Jackson, Preacher of God's Word at Faith's under Paul's. London, 1658.*

“For though I have grievously offended men, yet have I chiefly to do with Thee. For unto Thee, unto Thee, have I peculiarly offended; and though I went about to deceive men, yet could I not deceive Thee, a most evident eye-witness, and my judge. Therefore, I neither desire to be justified, neither can I desire it, seeing Thou hast decreed most justly those things that Thou hast pronounced against me, and I confess plainly that nothing is faulty in Thy judgments toward me.”—*The Psalms of David truly opened and explained by Paraphrase, according to the true sense of every Psalm, &c, set forth in Latin by that excellent learned man, Theodore Beza, and faithfully translated into English by Anthonie Gilbie. At London, 1580.*

“This will be the fruit or consequent of my sin, that whatever severities Thou shalt use towards me and mine, it will be no blemish to Thy benignity, or righteousness, or fidelity, but the blame of all will rest on my head, as I desire it may; and Thy justice will be glorified by all men. *In thy words,—i. e., in all Thy threatenings denounced against me by Nathan, and in any further sentence which Thou shalt see fit to pass upon me. When*

\* Extends only over seven verses.



*thou judgest,—i. e., when Thou dost plead or contend with me, or execute Thy sentence or judgment upon me, or (Rom. iii. 4) when any man shall presume to censure Thee, as not keeping Thy covenant and mercy promised to David.”—Poole’s Annotations. London, 1683.*

“Therefore, when he saw that through men’s merciful judgments, occasion was sought to assault God’s righteousness, he encounters them betimes, and avouches that it is wrongfully done to ascribe any part of the fault unto God; for he himself was so wholly and altogether to blame, that God continues holy, and His righteousness and truth stand unimpaired. . . . ‘Lord, although Thou pluck me out of heaven and throw me headlong down to hell, I will lie still and yield; but Thou, in the meanwhile, shalt keep still Thy judgment-seat, as Thou art worthy; neither shall aught of Thy righteousness be abated, though men carp at Thee.’”—*Calvin : Commentary on the Psalms, in loc.*

“But in very deed David’s meaning was St Paul’s meaning; and it will fit the context here as well as there. That which both intended is, to give all the glory to God; which is best done by man, when man freely acknowledgeth his own wretchedness and sinfulness, and pronounceth, at the same time, perfect truth and goodness to belong to God only. Hence it is that sinners are properly said *to glorify God* when they freely and fully confess their sins, as is shewed before in the beginning of these notes.”—*Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament : this Second Edition so enlarged as they make an entire Commentary on the Sacred Scripture ; the like never before published in English, &c. By the Westminster Assembly of Divines. 2 vols. folio. London, 1651.*



VER. 5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

INSTEAD of "I was shapen," the accurate rendering of the Hebrew word is, "I was brought forth." "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me." He is not low enough down yet : he must come lower. It is not enough for him to confess that the water is filthy at this pool : he goes back to the source, and confesses that the whole river is polluted, up to its head. The source is unclean : the very spring wells forth foul waters. The simple fact here stated is, that this man, taught of the Spirit of God, acknowledges not only that he is guilty of many actual transgressions, but that his nature was bad : that he is evil, and all evil, and only evil, and evil from the very beginning. When he began to be, and before he was capable of any actual guilt, he was a creature of sin. By nature he was a child of wrath even as others. The Holy Ghost, speaking by the mouth of David, saith that

men are conceived in sin. They are born in iniquity : but 'more, they were also conceived in it. They have not only gone astray, speaking lies from their mother's womb, but their very organisation is evil. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, and that from the very moment of conception.

This is the doctrine of original sin. If language can convey meaning, that doctrine is taught us here. There was nothing singular, nothing whatever peculiar, about David's birth, nor about his conception, nor about his mother. On the whole, he was rather better, not worse, than others. If it was true about him, it is true about me and about you and about every other man who was born, or will be born, into this our world. This is not the place to argue the doctrine. It has been argued, and defended, against all assailants. It can be argued again, if need be ; only now, and here, is neither the time nor the place. It is my business, first, simply to point out the fact, and then to shew the use which David makes of it. And note well that he goes to the root of the matter. Earnest men always do that. Thus merchants balance their books, if they would remain solvent. Thus skilful physicians probe

chronic sores, if they would save their patient's life. Thus wise master-builders lay their foundations low and deep, if they would erect a stable building. You have but scratched the surface, if you leave original sin out of view. When farmers would rid their fields of weeds, they go to the root. You may cut your weeds over by the surface, and make all look well for a time ; but when you return you have a more abundant crop than ever. If a man would free himself from sin, he must lay God's axe to the root of the tree. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity : " and "in sin did my mother conceive me."

Mark, further : David does not bring this forth as an extenuation of his sin ; but the reverse. He speaks of this now, and here, because it is an aggravation of his guilt. Some men act quite contrary to this. They play with the doctrines of God's Holy Word. Convince them that the Bible speaks of all men as being originally sinful since the fall, and they tell you, then they cannot help sinning. They plead their original sin, and this their natural depravity, as an excuse for their actual transgressions. The truth is, these men seek to make God the author of their sin. They dare not, usually, say so in as many

words ; perhaps they do not usually dare even to express the thought (so to speak) distinctly and definitely in their own minds ; yet, this is what they run it all back to ; and then they wash their hands of the guilt of their daily sins, and go back to the enjoyment of them with a double relish.

This stricken sinner has other thoughts. He adds his birth-sin to all his sins. He says, " Lord, I am not only bad now, but I am all bad, and was always bad. I was born bad, and was bad before I was born. I am a child of wrath ; born of children of wrath. That is my natural inheritance, that my birthright. I am bad to the very centre of my being. I am a fountain of sin. I am a polluted stream, from a polluted spring. I was never better than I now am, but by Thy grace. And it was I, this filthy and polluted thing ; I, this born child of the devil ; I, born an heir of hell, a child of wrath ; it was I that lifted up my hand against the God of heaven ; it was I that sinned against Thee." Behold this ! Here is a sight fit to make angels wonder and weep ; here is a sight fit to make devils laugh and shout in songs of triumph.

These are the thoughts that wring piercing cries

for mercy from a man's heart. It is thoughts like these that teach a man to pray. When a man feels this degradation and misery under which he lies, he goes to God in real earnest, seeking deliverance from it all. You wonder at the force and fervour of this man's prayers. You are astonished at his burning words, the power of his pleas, the urgency and the eager haste wherewith he presses home his arguments; behold the reason! "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." See over what a precipice he is hovering, and just about to fall for ever headlong down; see from what dark depths of sin he is seeking deliverance. Hope from other than God there is none. Help from any quarter but from God only is an impossibility; no wonder then that he cries in earnest. Think how a shipwrecked man, floating on his raft in mid-ocean, cries when he sees a sail dwindling down to a little white speck, and disappearing in the dim far distance. It is his last chance, his only hope; and he cries as only a despairing, dying man can cry.

Note further, that true conviction of one sin leads us to see, and feel, and confess other sins. The prophet rebuked the king for this one set of sins;

but the train, once fairly set in motion, never stops till it reaches the very bottom of the declivity. He goes deeper and deeper down, till he reaches the root. His thoughts go further in, come closer home, till he cries, Behold, I am vile, all vile, and was always vile ! There is no stopping short of this trunk-root of all evil, if you once begin with the conviction of any one sin. The quack deals with the manifestation of disease ; the true physician probes it to its source, and grapples with the enemy in its ultimate fastness. There is no evicting sin, unless you lay hold of its main root. It is in the nature ; the taint is in the spring of life : it will only die if killed there.

And what a lesson to parents is here ; to mothers ! See what an inheritance you have transmitted to your child. Thus you brought it into the world. This nature of evil was transmitted through you. Is any labour too hard to undo this evil, which, in one true sense, you have done ? This nature can be eradicated, and a new nature can be imparted. This evil disease can be cast out by the great Physician. You have seen mothers who have transmitted some disease of their body to their children !



You have seen what consulting, what expense, what repeated effort there has been to have it removed, and health restored. And you know what a heart-break it is to parents so long as it remains. But the soul is precious above the body, far as heaven is above the earth, and as infinite, endless eternity exceeds and excels the few fleeting days of time. What are you doing for the soul of your child? Mother! that child whom you brought forth in iniquity, what have you done to have the iniquity taken away? Do you know that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; and have you yet never taken your child to be washed? You have cared for its body; that you have washed, fed, and clothed: you have cared for the mind; that you have taught, and trained, and instructed: you have cared for this world; you have saved, and spared, and stored up for your child's future; what have you done for its soul: what provision have you made for the next world, for eternity? How do you expect to stand in the judgment, when you have to come up before God, and to bring your child, your children, with you?

David says, "Behold, I was born in iniquity."

David's Lord says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Here is the first birth; it is in sin and iniquity. There needs a second, if a man would see the face of God in peace. "*Ye must be born again.*" The second change is so like the first, that they get the same name. All old things pass away, and, behold, all things become new. It is not a mere change of words, of companions, of tastes, of pursuits. Many get "another heart," as the Lord gave Saul, who never get the "new heart," which God gave to David. The change is radical. The old things all go; the new things all come. Earth goes, heaven comes. Man goes, God comes. Self goes, Christ comes. I am crucified with Christ, yet I live. I seek to be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith. "Behold, *I was conceived in sin.*" Lord, that I may be born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever!

VER, 6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

THESE words are difficult to understand in their connexion. I rather follow many of the older expositors than the moderns. For example:—"This is an aggravation of his sin. Lying was a great part of it. He had acted deceitfully all through in the matter of Uriah: but Thou desirest truth, not only without, but within, for, 'behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.'" "The words divide themselves naturally into two parts, as they do contain two arguments and considerations, whereby David doth amplify and aggravate his sin:—1. What a one God would have David and all his children to be, that is to say, upright in heart. 2. What a one David was before he fell into these foul sins; God had wrought soundness of grace in his heart—"in the

hidden part thou hadst made me to know wisdom,' for the words will easily bear that translation."\*

Says another—"Hereby most ingeniously discovering another aggravation of his sin, in that it was perpetrated against the knowledge which God had not only revealed to him outwardly in His word, but also inwardly, or, as the apostle Peter has it, 'in the hidden man of the heart,' by His Spirit. Every circumstance in the state of the offender only serves to discover the vileness of the offence."†

Another—"In the hidden part Thou *hadst* made me to know wisdom; *that* Thou hadst done; but I have fallen from my high state, marred Thy handiwork. By one plunge into lust I have fallen and fouled myself."‡

These and many others follow this method of

\* CLII. Lectures upon Psalm li., preached at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, in Leicestershire, by that late faithful and worthy minister of Jesus Christ, Mr Arthur Hildersham. London, 1635.—This work is a bulky folio, yet the exposition only extends over the first seven verses of the psalm.

† The Portraiture of the Christian Penitent, attempted in a Course of Sermons upon Psalm li., &c. By the Rev. Charles De Coetlogon, A.M. 2 vols., Second edition. London, 1776.

‡ Annotations upon the Five Books immediately following the Historical Parts of the Old Testament, &c. By Arthur Jackson, Preacher of God's Word at Faith's under Paul's. London, 1658.

interpretation. On the whole, it seems to me the best. The two "beholds" indicate the same style of thought. Both verses are confessions, both aggravations of guilt. The petition for cleansing is resumed in the following verse. God desires truth within; and within me, by nature, there is no truth. There is sin in me, there are lies in me, utter falsehood is in me. There is a lie in my heart of hearts; the first fold of my being is sin, is a lie. I am fashioned, and have grown up, on sin; sin is my framework; sin is my food and drink; sin is covering and all to me, and that even from my youth. And "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." Thou desirest it; the word expresses great and strong desires. Thou so desirest it, that Thou lovest to see that alone; art only delighted and pleased with truth there. It is Thy desire and delight that there, in my soul, the thing that is shall be in harmony with the outward and visible act and fact; that there shall not be one thing in my heart and another thing in my eye, looking as if it came from my heart; that there shall not be one thing in my heart, and another and quite different thing on my lips, professing to speak out the thought of my heart; that there shall

not be one thing in my heart, and another and quite different thing in my hands, in my outer life, in my daily dealings and actings with men. This is what Thou desirest; this is what Thou lovest to look upon. Thou wouldst have Thy children to be thus. And, Lord, Thou knowest what I have been. Thou knowest how I have gone about like a very whited sepulchre. Thou knowest how I have deceived men, played the hypocrite for months and months together. I have been an incarnate lie, walking about under Thine eye, dead, insensate, dry and withered, and fit only to be fuel for the fire.

I lay before the reader another extract from an old author who treats this text in this same way. I give the title in full below, as it is curious.\* This

\* David's Repentance; or, A Plain and Familiar Exposition of the 51st Psalm; first preached, and now published, for the benefit of God's Church. Wherein every Christian may set before his eyes the pattern of unfeigned repentance; likewise exhorting every man to labour for repentance before sickness and death seize upon them; for after death there is no repentance to be had or expected. The fourteenth edition, newly revised and profitably amplified by the author, Samuel Smith, late Preacher of the Word at Prittlewell, in Essex. London: Printed by John Okes, 1640.—This book must have had a "run" in its day, for here, what was then very uncommon, is the *fourteenth edition*, and all apparently within the author's lifetime; and yet he, and his book, have equally perished almost from the memory of man.

is his translation of the verse:—"Behold, thou lovest truth in the inward affections; therefore hast thou taught me wisdom in the secret of my heart." When he comes to unfold the meaning of the words, he paraphrases thus:—"As if he should have said, O Lord my God, Thou art a most holy and a most just God, and canst abide no unclean thing. But I, even David, once a creature after Thy own heart, sanctified by Thy Holy Spirit, have spoiled all, and by filthy uncleanness and adultery, as also murder, and shedding of guiltless blood, have defiled and stained myself, both body and soul; so as I am now clean out of order, and so foul that I am not worthy to come into Thy presence; so as, instead of that inward purity and sincerity, and that uprightness both in soul and body, I have brought out most ugly and cursed fruits of sin and uncleanness. Thus doth he still lay open his misery and aggravate his sin before the Lord." On the second clause of the verse he thus speaks:—"The prophet David, in this last place, aggravateth his sin by that knowledge which God in mercy had bestowed upon him, namely, that God had taught him heavenly wisdom by the law of God, whereby he knew



very well what God required at his hands, and how he ought to serve and worship God. Nay, that He had taught him wisdom, not after a common manner, but even by His blessed Spirit had taught him wisdom in the secret of his heart, in a special manner revealing His will unto him. And, therefore, he confesseth that his sin was the more heinous and grievous ; for if he had never been sanctified, nor truly called : if he had been ignorant and blind in the Word of God : though it could not excuse him, yet his sin had not been so great. But seeing he who had made so good proceeding in the service and worship of God, who had taught others, who was so enlightened by the Spirit, and had been taught in a special manner, against knowledge, against conscience, had so foully sinned against God, this highly increaseth and aggravateth his sin."

The whole verse, then, is a confession, in the form of a statement of the circumstances that aggravate his sin. God desires truth ; truth everywhere ; above all, truth in the heart. That truth David had not acted, had not been. Besides, the sinner was not an ignorant man. God had taught him the true wisdom. In his heart he had known, felt, loved



the truth of God. Sin, too, he had been made to know as an evil and a bitter thing. Its evil consequences hereafter, as well as here, he had been taught to know. And yet he had sinned. He had forsaken God, to take up with his sin once more. This is that which aggravates his sin, and increases it in every part. I, who was born in sin, and who had grown up in sin, and who had been cleansed from sin, did deliberately befoul myself again. I, who had known the depth and darkness of death, and the light and love of life, I did again forsake life and choose sin and death. There never was such sin; there never was such a sinner. Of them all I am the chief.

Thus does this man, taught of God, confess his sin. Do we confess it thus? Do we thus dwell upon it, to seek out its whole evil, and confess its whole guilt? Is sin to us a matter of so much importance as this, and do we seek to get all the smallest fibres of it thus eradicated? David's God is our God; the Spirit of holiness is still the same: has He taught us in this way?

The sins of God's people are not less, but greater, than those of the unconverted. David here adduces all his past attainments as aggravations of his sin.

He does not seek to plead with God that his whole past life up to that point had been good, as a set-off against the few and evil days of his sin. He does not think his past goodness makes him any better, nor his sin any less, nor more deserving of pardon. He takes the other side of all these propositions. His sin is more than that of other men, by exactly so much in proportion as he had been better than other men. The better his past life had been, the more and the farther ought he to have been removed from the possibility of sin; above all, of such sins. He had a long road to go before he could commit sin. He was far above it, and had to come down to it; and it was a sad and sorrowful downcome. No wonder they were bitter tears he had to shed over every remembrance of it. It was truly disgraceful.

And the lesson reads further, that no saint should feel secure in himself for one moment. No attainments in grace, it would appear, put a man beyond the possibility of sinning. The apostle lays down the lesson in this way: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." That is, when a man begins to think that now he has got to be an

established Christian, and is firm in the faith, and feels as if he had not now to be so constantly on his guard as formerly against sin in all shapes: then, says the apostle, whenever a man gets to that point, and thinketh he standeth, let him take heed; that man *needs* to take heed, for he is tottering to a fall. God placed David full in the eye of the whole Church: He placed him high in rank, and power, and dignity: He gave him grace above the measure which He gives to most, and made him to know wisdom in the whole inner man: and yet, this David, the holy and the good, fell, and fell in the most shameless way, into the most shameless sins. If he did so, how can we expect to stand for so much as one moment, unless we stand strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might? No strength of resolution will hold us. No past attainments in grace and holiness will help us up; no amount of steadfastness in the faith, acquired by long habit and constant endeavours, will hold us up. God alone is able to keep us from falling. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." They only are safe whom God keeps: He who keepeth thee shall never slumber.

God requires truth in the inward parts. He requires it: and He will not be satisfied without it; will accept nothing short of it. He requires it from all men, especially does He require it from His own. They, above all others, should walk in truth, speak the truth in love, act out the truth, be true, be the truth itself. And God will have it in the heart, in the thought, in the whole inner man. To that inner man He is present: He and our souls ever face each other: and there God requires truth. Men regard the outward appearance, can know no more, and can see no farther. God looketh upon the heart, and there requireth truth. He has a right to require it; for He himself is the truth. He requires it, and will have it: He cannot be put off without it. They who are not true within are not God's. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. They who are Christ's know the truth: love it: hide it in their heart: are true. They give the truth, for God requires it, and they have it to give. Jesus Christ is theirs, and He is the truth. They have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things. "I have not written unto you," says the apostle John, "because

ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

It is God alone that can teach man wisdom in the heart, as well as in the understanding. Without the teaching of God's wisdom by God's Spirit, the wisest men of this world have been but fools. They know a good deal: a great many parts of truth they do get to know; but all truth centres in, and radiates from Jesus Christ, and they who know Him not, can know nothing aright. He is the truth: the source and the sum of all truth. All things were made by Him, and for Him. They are all upheld by Him, and do all manifest His glory. This is the chief end of all things. And he who does not see that, nor know it well, lacks the key of all true knowledge; men who are thus without Christ go they know not whither, and stumble at they know not what. There is a man spoken of in the Gospels, who had amassed great wealth: he was contriving how he might bestow what he had, and thus make room for more. That was a "far-seeing man: a most wise, and prudent, and thoughtful man!" Yet God said to him, "Thou fool!" It is Jesus Christ who of God is made unto us wisdom:

without Him men perish in their folly. Learned men smile calmly on you, with a sweet, soft, bland smile of conscious superiority, when you tell them such plain and obvious truths as these. They look down on you with so pitying, gently pitying an air, as if they would say, "You know no better; but who could expect it of you? You do not read mathematics; you do not study astronomy and geology; the wonders of the heavens above, and of the depths below, are all shut out from you: you are dim, and dark, and narrow, and know but little. I can afford to pity you, and smile on you with a smile something short of contempt." The wisdom of this world cannot be made to see that the highest knowledge is simply ignorance when it is without the knowledge of Jesus Christ; nor can it be made to see that the very highest knowledge is more than compatible with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. They learn fast whom Christ teaches. Dr Chalmers was once great in all this literature and learning of the Egyptians, and he thought Egypt the best place in the world, and its flesh-pots the best of food. But he came out, and chose rather to suffer affliction, like Moses, with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of

sin for a season. He knew the mathematics well, and chemistries, and geologies ; all lore he had read, and known. They taunted him once in public with the change that had come over him, and reproduced some of his former words against him. And he acknowledged it all. "Yes," he said, "yes, I know it well. When I wrote that pamphlet, I was much occupied with the science which investigates the relations of number and quantity ; but there were two magnitudes whose proportions I neglected to compute—the littleness of time, and the vastness of eternity." This is the wisdom which God alone can teach ; but He does teach it. And when He teaches, He does so effectively, savingly. He will not let us forget. For a time David got rid of his God-given wisdom, and returned to his foolishness ; but God sent Nathan to him in the fulness of His own time, and this psalm was the result, one of the results. The wisest man that ever was upon the earth spoke of all the wisdom which this world has, and can give, as only vanity of vanities : behold, it is all vanity. You may lay your hand on the head of the wisest man you can find, and say to him with perfect truth, There is no wisdom in the grave, whither thou



goest. They to whom God gives wisdom, to whom He makes Jesus Christ wisdom, are wise unto salvation. After death, they that be thus wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.



VER. 7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

THIS is a very precious verse. The Psalmist has now ended his confession, and he seeks forgiveness. There is no doubt about the meaning here. Every simple reader of the Bible understands this petition. Oh, how often has this precious prayer ascended to God from a penitent heart, through unfeigned lips! What an amount of good God has brought out of all this evil! Had David never sinned so foully he had never repented so truly, and confessed so thoroughly, and then this prayer had never been penned. How many saints of God have blessed and praised His name for this psalm, and for this verse of it. I will again trespass on the reader's patience with an extract or two from the older authors. Here is one,—“The Chaldee paraphraseth, ‘Thou wilt sprinkle me like a priest which sprinkleth

the unclean with the purifying waters, and with hyssop, and with the ashes of a heifer, and I shall be clean.'” \* Again,—“For the first petition, ‘Purge me with hyssop:’ in these words he alludeth to the legal ceremonies, and manner of purging, used in the time of the old law, in the purifying of the leper, and of any person polluted: they were to dip the bunch of hyssop in blood, or in water, and so sprinkle it on the person to be purified; which ceremony was a type and figure of the blood of Jesus Christ, who is that alone sacrifice and Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. Now then, seeing by this sprinkling with hyssop in the blood of beasts is meant the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ; when he saith, ‘Purge me with hyssop,’ it is all one as if he should have said, O Lord, I am exceedingly polluted, and stained with sin and uncleanness, and no leper was ever more vile and loathsome than I am now in Thy sight, neither is there any water to wash and purge me:

\* Annotations upon the Book of Psalms: wherein the Hebrew words and sentences are compared with, and explained by, the ancient Greek and Chaldee version; but chiefly by conference with the Holy Scriptures. By Henry Ainsworth. London, 1639.

but I beseech thee of Thy mercy to wash me, and to sprinkle my soul with the blood of that immaculate Lamb Christ Jesus, that can alone take away my sins, and so I shall be made clean and pure again." Here is another,—“‘Purge me with hyssop.’ The meaning is this, Accept of that most perfect and everlasting sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the punishment due to my sin. As if he should have said, O Lord, I confess I have sinned exceedingly, I have been born in sin, and have by murder and adultery deserved to be condemned eternally, and to have the curse and punishment due to my sin to be cast upon me ; but I beseech Thee in mercy to accept of the death and bloodshedding of Thy Son and my Saviour Jesus Christ for the satisfaction due to my sins. David, he watered his cheeks by day and his couch by night. And indeed tears of true penitents are the wine of the angels, for there is joy in heaven over a repenting sinner : and those that have a sorrowful heart have the sword of David and the bow of Jonathan ; for there is no rhetoric in God's sight like that of sighs and tears ; for tears have a voice, as it may appear by David's words, ‘Thou hast heard the voice of my weeping ;’ and by our

unfeigned tears we offer violence to heaven, and tie the ears of God to the tongues of men.”\*

The “hyssop” is only mentioned in four different connexions in the Old Testament. *First*, a bunch of hyssop was to be used in sprinkling the blood of the paschal lamb on the lintel and the two side-posts of the door of the house; *second*, in connexion with the sprinkling prescribed for the purification of the leper (Lev. xiv.); *third*, in connexion with the purifications by means of the ashes of the red heifer (Num. xix.); and *fourth*, incidentally, in stating the wisdom of Solomon, and his stores of knowledge, it is said that he knew all about trees, from the cedar of Lebanon down to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.

Usually, cedar-wood, and scarlet wool, and the hyssop come together. Some, taking a hint from the reference in Solomon’s case, will have it that the cedar and the hyssop thus brought together indicate the two extremes, majesty and meanness; sovereignty and condescension. Thus, they say, does God pardon sin: with an infinite majesty and kingly power; and at the same time with all con-

\* Samuel Smith.

descension, stooping low and coming near, and waiting to be gracious. These things are gloriously true ; whether or not they be in the type is another matter. Again, you have in this combination the highest and the lowest. Though He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet He emptied Himself, and took on Him the form of a servant, and was obedient unto death. This obedience unto *death* is the scarlet line, the scarlet wool of the means of cleansing, say some. But there is no wood like the cedar. "The cedar is most useful when dead. It is the most productive when its place knows it no more. There is no timber like it. Firm in grain, and capable of the finest polish, the tooth of no insect will touch it, and Time himself can hardly destroy it. Diffusing a perpetual fragrance through the chambers which it ceils, the worm will not corrode the book which it protects, nor the moth corrupt the garment which it guards ; all but immortal itself, it transfuses its amaranthine qualities to the objects around it."\* These words suggest great thoughts of Him over whom death has now no more power. His name

\* Rev. Dr James Hamilton.

is as ointment poured forth. Neither moth nor rust, worm nor fire, here nor hereafter, touches any whom Jesus guards, whose Jesus is. Altogether immortal, He gives eternal life to all who are His own ; and says to them simply, " Because I live, ye shall live also."

Some restrict the allusion of David here to the cleansing of the leper, and others to that by means of the ashes of the red heifer ; but it is better to take the statement quite generally, and see in it a reference to the sacrifices and methods of cleansing prescribed by God under the law. The Hebrew word rendered " purge," is often used in connexion with the sacrifices and offerings for sin, and indeed is hardly ever properly otherwise used. It is no straining of the word, but simply bringing out its obvious meaning, to say that the idea in the Psalmist's mind was not, Wash me with water ; but, Wash me with blood. It is a sacrificial cleansing. It is not ordinary washing, but blood-washing. It implies and involves an atonement ; it sees substitution, life substituted for my life, that life taken, the blood shed, and applied. The word " purge " by itself would mean all that. It is not recondite ; and

so it is not by straining and tugging that you get all that out of it; but all that lies on its surface, and would naturally suggest itself to a Hebrew heart, so soon as the word fell on a Hebrew ear. When the hyssop is added, there can be no mistake possible. Now he is suggesting more definite thoughts still. Now there rise up to a Hebrew mind, at the very mention of this word, thoughts of that dark night when first his fathers came out of Egypt. He sees some venerable sire of his race coming forth of his own door: a bason is in his hand full of the blood of the lamb, the Paschal lamb; he sees him solemnly dip his hyssop-bunch into the blood, and lifting eye and hand to heaven, strike it on the lintel, and on each side-post of his door. What does this mean? It means, that when the destroying angel comes, and he is surely coming, his eye will see, and his hand will be arrested by, that blood of the slain lamb, and the household will be safe. The mention of the hyssop might suggest all that; but its being connected with the word "purge," would send a Hebrew's thoughts further on. They would suggest to him thoughts of a leper; and what thoughts these were!



“The leper’s ‘clothes are to be rent,’ just as in all cases of mourning and woe. This indicated that the leper was now exposed to the full view of God and man, in his state of decay and corruption. His ‘head bare’ also. All coverings are stript off, as in the case of one mourning for the dead. For the leper was counted as dead in his flesh; as we read in Num. xii. 12, when Miriam’s leprosy was prayed for, ‘Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother’s womb.’ So also he ‘covers his upper lip,’ another token of woe. His mouth is regarded as shut: he cannot speak to men any longer, only through the shroud comes the half-suppressed cry, ‘*Unclean, unclean.*’ The pale, ghastly face; the covering spread up to the sunk and hollow eyes; the unsightly form, muffled up from view, to hide corruption and putrefying sores—all conveyed the idea of one already cut off from the number of living men, lingering at the gates of death, and hanging about its door-posts, impatient for entrance there. He is forced to dwell alone, ‘as those who have long been dead;’ permitted to come only within sight of the camp, but not to enter, tanta-



lised by seeing afar off the happy tents of healthy, holy Israel. He sits without in mourning and sadness, pining away in his woe, every vein in every limb running down with putrid blood, his head sick and pained, his countenance disgusting the onlooker by the sallow hue of death, his mind filled with sad remembrances and gloomy imaginations. A gray blister, indicating the rising boil, now and then spots his temples; the hair hangs dry, lank, and sapless on his brow; the nails of his bony fingers are discoloured and tainted. He moves his body slowly, tottering along on feet that are nearly powerless, and men 'hide their faces from him' (Isaiah liii. 3) as he draws near. Even the wild Arab that scours past on his swift steed, starts at the loathsome spectacle, and hastens away. The leper himself feels life ebbing slowly away; the blood still flows, but it is not with the freedom of health, and the arteries have no longer their full floods, like rushing torrents, but are clogged with thick, clammy, sluggish moisture."\* Such is a picture of the leper: and this is sin, this is David's

\* Commentary on Leviticus, by Rev. Andrew A. Bonar—a book which the learned and the unlearned, equally, may consult both with pleasure and profit.

condition: it is this, as it feebly shadows forth the state of the soul, that would be suggested by the cry to God for purging, and with the hyssop.

Or it would send his thoughts to yet another scene. A man has been defiled. He has touched the dead, a grave, or the bone of a dead man. He is unclean. Whoso touches him shares in his defilement. Then the red heifer comes, is slain, is burnt, its ashes are mixed with water, and the hyssop is again used for sprinkling till the man is clean. He is restored to his place in the great congregation, and can come and go before the Lord as one of His people.

David is unclean. He is separated by his sin from all holy ones. His touch is defilement. He cannot look up to God, and God cannot look upon him without abhorrence. There is no way of drawing near, and of again being one with God and His people, but by blood-shedding, blood-sprinkling. Your iniquity has separated between you and your God. You are a leper: your touch is defilement, disease: you are in a state of separation: you are fit company for only leprous men like yourself: them alone you cannot harm, with them alone can you hold

converse. All this David has seen and felt. And he cries now for cleansing. It is not mere pardon he seeks: it is atonement; it is a sacrificial purification: it is blood shed, life taken: it is blood sprinkled, actually applied, so that his soul may come into contact with it, and live in the death of another: it is blood shed, sprinkled, and accepted of God. It is hyssop: to actually apply this shed blood of another to my soul and conscience. It is hyssop: the blood must not only be shed, but brought near, and actually put on: by no way can these sin-stains be cleansed out but by a fresh application of the blood of cleansing. It is the hyssop therefore: the hyssop, Lord, for Thy sinful child; a fresh application of the peace-speaking blood which cleanseth us from all sin.\*

And observe, David does not go to the priest, and seek this. That, doubtless, he would do in fitting time. It would have been an easy thing for this King of all Israel to demand and receive from the High Priest all that the law in the letter of it re-

\* "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much sope, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God."—JER. ii. 22.

quired and could give. To him that would not have been refused. But what David seeks is what David, along with every earnest soul, needs: it is the thing signified by these outward rites and ceremonies. They had served their end. They had taught him to know what an evil and cursed thing sin is, and what it does: and they had taught him how God pardoned and purified; and that is what he seeks. The law has created a void which it cannot fill, excited desires and longings which it cannot satisfy: for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to *every one* that believeth. The blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, only sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. They went no further in themselves than the bringing back of the unclean to the friendship and outward fellowship of the typical people of God: but that they did: and if they did that, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot unto God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? A true knowledge of sin sends a man to the only source of pardon.

The mass of the Jews of David's day were perfectly satisfied with what the priest could give. They had but superficial notions of sin, and so they were satisfied with the appearance of pardon. Outward restrictions were all removed, and there they could rest satisfied. But the God-taught, the true Israel, went deeper. In the outward washings they could read the soul's pollution and the method of cleansing; and with nothing less than God's own absolution could they be satisfied. Purge Thou me, therefore, says David, and I shall be clean. Thou must be my priest. Thou must take the blood of Thine own providing: and Thou must apply it to my conscience. Then I shall be clean; not till then. All the waters of Abana and Pharpar, all the waters of the Jordan, cannot do it:—

“ Not the labour of my hands,  
Can fulfil Thy law's demands:  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow;  
All for sin could not atone—  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”

He says, I shall be clean. The Hebrew word for *clean* is also a ceremonial word. It denotes more than the cleanness produced by simple washing: it

speaks of the cleanness produced by sacrificial washing. It is the cleanness of a man who has performed all that the law demanded, who has made complete atonement, and is reinstated in the full and unrestricted use of all his former privileges. It means all this in its simple use : but it is evident that as David here uses it, speaking to God, it means more than this. It means, I shall be clean, not with that cleanness which is given by the law to those who fulfil all its requirements ; but I shall be clean with the cleanness of which that is only the outward type. Had David used these words in an address to the High Priest, the meaning of them would have been to him abundantly plain. He would have said, " I am defiled : I am unclean : I am a leper : have touched a grave, a corpse, a dead man's bone. Provide for me the sacrifices appointed ; apply the hyssop that I may be clean." All this would have been simple and plain. But all these things have a meaning. That High Priest is himself only a shadow, whose substance is the Lord Jesus Christ. David, therefore, goes to God through the Great High Priest : through Him he makes his confession : through Him and His blood-



washing he seeks to be made clean : to have his sin purged away : to be restored to the face and favour of God, and to be made to feel that, as God has pardoned him, he is entitled again to go forth among the people of God as their brother, because, like them, he is God's accepted son.

The second clause of the verse is a repetition of the first. The idea is repeated, according to the usual parallelism of Hebrew poetry. The Hebrew word for "wash" is the same as that used in the second verse. It is also a sacrificial word. It often occurs in the 14th of Leviticus, in the ordinances concerning the leprous washings, and in the 19th of Numbers, in the description of the method of cleansing by the ashes of the red heifer. So, it is still a sacrificial cleansing that he seeks. It is a satisfaction to Divine justice, based on a life taken, betokened by the blood-sprinkling. "I shall be clean" of the first clause, is balanced by the "I shall be whiter than snow" of the second.

What is whiter than snow? White, and very fair, and beautiful as it is, yet it comes out of a dense black cloud, not from the clear blue sky. It does not come from the white, snow-looking

clouds that wreathe and float and bask in a winter's sun. It is when the heavens are black, and from out of the murky bosom of the very blackest cloud on which your eye rests, that the white snow comes.

What could be blacker than this man as he lay in his sins? He was black as devils of the pit. His soul was stained with the most horrid and repulsive sins. Yet he seeks to be washed, and knows that when washed, he will be clean, whiter than the driven snow. Ah, that virgin flake is very white, as it spreads its delicate network on the withered leaf : but there is one thing whiter still. Who are these in white robes, and whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation ; out of dark pits of sin and death. Some were thieves, and some were murderers : and some were adulterers and murderers combined, as David was. Manasseh is there, who filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood ; and Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ cast seven devils ; and thousands more, once vile as they : but now there is not a stain on their garments ; they have all been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and they are all



whiter than snow, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.\*

The man who sees sin best, who sees that it is black and soul-polluting, sees also best how pure and perfect he may become. David speaks of himself as the vilest of sinners, yet he says, *I shall be whiter than snow.* He knows what God can do: he knows the power of that peace-speaking blood: it cleanseth us from all sin. Paul speaks of himself as the very chief of sinners; and yet, almost in the same breath, he speaks of the glorious gospel of the blessed God as committed to his trust: of his obtaining mercy, and of the crown of righteousness that awaited him. But God must do it. The washing can be done by no priest. The pardon can come through no human source. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned:" from Thee, Thee only, can I obtain mercy.

This cleansing is within reach of the guiltiest.

\* Mr M'Cheyne was observed standing looking forth of his window, one clear, frosty winter's afternoon. The sun shone, and the snow glittered white and fair. He was seen to look upon it very lovingly, with glowing eye, and was heard to mutter to himself, "Whiter than snow! whiter than snow!"

This door of hope stands wide open to every man, anywhere, on the face of the earth. Murder, adultery, and lies, do not shut it. The greater the sin the greater the need of mercy. It is ever the policy of the devil to make the man who is troubled for sin feel that his case is, somehow, an exception. But there are no exceptions: and the men who are disposed to make exceptions of themselves, should be told that the very fact that they would make out their sins to be so great as to constitute theirs an exceptional case, is the strongest evidence possible that theirs is the very case that God accepts. It is sinners, emphatically, that Jesus is come to seek and to save. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, unto repentance." "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." These are the thoughts of the great Physician of souls.

This blood alone can cleanse us. Had there been anything else within the reach of man that could cleanse, David could have got it. There never was a priesthood like that among the people over which he was king. All that wealth could do, all that power could bring, all that favoured circumstances with both God and man could either give him or

get for him, he had : but he has to come here to this blood which is shed for him, and for you, and for me. If anything else could have brought about this end, it would have been substituted by God. It was only "last of all" that He sent His Son. It was because no other hand could help and no other eye pity, that God interposed, and finally sent forth His Son, saying, "They will reverence my Son." All other remedies have been tried by God and man, and they have all failed. Come here ; wash, and be clean.

This remedy of God's providing is amply sufficient. This blood cleanseth us from all sin. The very blackest may be made whiter than snow. Each man fancies that his sin is greater than his brother's, when he is thoroughly awakened to its being sin against God. It may be so : but it is not greater than the power of Christ's blood. Few sins could be greater than the combined sins of David. Take them all in all : sum up the aggravations : remember his position, and the great things that God had done for him : think of the peculiarly horrible way in which the husband of the ruined wife was foully done to death, and you will probably be

of opinion that greater sins never were committed. Grosser barbarities have been perpetrated : but they have been done by barbarians. Cruelties, refined and exquisite, have distinguished thousands in the dread annals of crime : but they have been committed by men whose hearts were hardened by a cruel trade, or by a hard and merciless superstition, misnamed religion. But this man had known the grace, and beheld the glory, of the Lord. He had both tasted and seen that God is gracious. The Lord had instructed him in His way, and had made him know wisdom in the hidden man of the heart ; and yet he sinned, and sinned thus : and yet God freely pardoned him : did wash him from all this foul guilt, and made him whiter than snow. Will not you, then, come to this God, and take up this man's prayer : seek, and find, mercy and grace : and so shall you find cleansing and rest for your soul ? \*

\* " The forgiveness that is with God is such as becomes Him, such as is suitable to His greatness, goodness, and the other excellences of His nature, such as that therein He will be known to be God. It is not like that narrow, difficult, halving, and manacled forgiveness that is found amongst men ; but it is full, free, boundless, bottomless, absolute—such as becomes His nature and excellences. It is, in a word, forgiveness that is with God, and by the exercise whereof He will be known so

“Whatsoever application hath been made to a man of Christ’s blood, in justification of his person, it doth not hinder, but rather doth open a way unto the renewed acts of application thereof, according as new sins do draw on new guiltiness: for, here, justified David prayeth to be yet again purged with hyssop.”\* They who are in the faith have no freedom to sin. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” But should they fall into sin they must just do as others do. They need washing, and must be washed, even as others. When they sin, they are often tempted to stay away from the blood: they do as David did, and stand moodily apart, assurance gone, the joy of salvation lost. This verse teaches us the remedy. Let us draw

to be. If there be any pardon with God, it is such as becomes Him to give: when He pardons He will abundantly pardon. Go with your half-forgiveness, limited, conditional pardons with reserves and limitations, unto the sons of men; it may be it may become them—it is like themselves: that of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun. Hence He is said to do this work with His whole heart and His whole soul, freely, bountifully, largely, to indulge and forgive unto us our sins, and to cast them unto the bottom of the sea—unto a bottomless ocean, an emblem of infinite mercy.”—*Owen on Psalm cxxx.*, ver. 4.

\* David Dickson: Annotations on the Psalms.

near and confess, and seek a renewed application of the blood ; this blood applied will again make us, in God's sight, and in our own, whiter than snow.

“As we must not neglect the ordinances of God, but must use them carefully for obedience unto God, and for strengthening of our faith, so we must not rest upon them, but seek in unto the signification, substance, and end of them, which is Christ ; as here David seeketh perfect pardon by Christ's blood, perfect purging and cleansing through Him, under the terms of purging with hyssop and washing.”\* Our ordinances are few and simple. The Sabbath and its services, and the sacraments. Yet they should all be carefully observed ; but observed in such a way as to get that which they signify and shadow forth. Either extreme is to be avoided. We are not to deprive ourselves of the benefit of ordinances, and shut ourselves up to the inward spiritual light : nor are we to make ordinances and sacraments all and in all. They are all nothing, except in so far as they teach us of Christ, help us to Christ, enable us to get nearer, and cling closer to Christ. But as far as they do this they are valu-

\* David Dickson, *ut supra*.

able, and ought to be most highly prized, and diligently observed. They are of God's appointing. There God has promised the blessing; there let us seek God, and not be content without finding Him. Purge me also with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Make the sacraments effectual means of grace to my soul. Meet with me at Thine own table, and bless me there: there let me find God, and know Him as my exceeding joy.

“Seeing David desired to be purged with hyssop, we learn hence, that the Lord would not that men should despise such ceremonies and types of Christ as He himself commanded in the time of the law; and though it may seem a vain and needless thing to besprinkle them with a bunch of hyssop dipped in the blood of a beast, yet, seeing it was the commandment of God, they did not despise the ceremony, it being a type of the blood of Christ. When they could not behold with bodily eyes the blood of Christ, it pleased God by such ceremonies and types to help their faith: by sprinkling the blood of a beast, to shew unto them that they must be sprinkled in their souls with the blood of Jesus Christ. Hence, we learn by the example of David,



and all the holy fathers and servants of God in the time of the law, to use all such sacraments and ceremonies as God commands in His Word for the helping of our faith. We cannot see the blood of Christ, nor touch it with our outward senses, yet the Lord hath appointed the sacrament of baptism, and the supper of the Lord, that in them we might see, feel, touch, and taste as it were the body and blood of Jesus Christ: and, therefore, all those which despise these sacraments, making little or no account of them, shew that they despise the ordinance of God, and so make light of that which is ordained for the good of their souls." All this an old writer saw in this verse.

"Behold here the greatness and heinousness of man's sins, which could be purged by no angel in heaven, nor man on earth; but only by the blood of Jesus Christ alone. If all men and angels should have died, and been cast for ever into hell fire, they could not satisfy the infinite wrath of God for one sin. The blood of Jesus Christ must be shed, else we can have no pardon. But if men do not repent of their sins, and leave them; or do not come with faith to apply the blood of Christ, they cannot have



pardon. As, if there were a sovereign plaster to cure any sore, if a man do not apply it to the wound, but let it lie in a box, it will do him no good : so, unless we apply the blood of Christ to our wounds and sores by faith, alas ! it cannot help us. And as the woman with the bloody issue touched Christ's garment, and was healed ; so if we can by faith touch the blood of our Saviour, and apply it to ourselves, it will heal all the bleeding wounds of sin. For, when God beholds a poor sinner covered with righteousness, holiness, and the obedience of His Son, our Saviour, then He accounts him as no sinner, but just and righteous : even as a man beholding anything through a red glass, it appeareth red, or of the same colour ; so, if the Lord look on us through Jesus, we seem righteous and holy before Him." \*

\* Samuel Smith, *ut supra*.



VER. 8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness ; that  
the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

It is more than pardon that David seeks : he would know that he is pardoned, and reinstated into full favour and love. He does not draw a bow at a venture, and *hope* it will hit the mark. He offers his prayer, and looks up, waiting till the answer comes. This is a matter that brooks no delay, and must not be left in uncertainty. He would be as he once was : would feel a father's arm again lovingly around him, pressing him close in to his own heart. This is the gospel. It is good news : certain tidings of good, given on God's part, received on ours. The gospel is admission at once into all favour, into each and every right and privilege of the sons of God. When God pardons any sin, He pardons all, fully : when He receives, He receives graciously. God's pardon is not given because of anything in or about us. It is given entirely on the ground of the work and worth, the obedience unto death, of an-

other, the Lord Jesus. God pardons and accepts us ; not because we are worthy, but because He is worthy : and hence it is that we are as acceptable to God on the first day of our coming to Him as on the last. There is no purgatory, here or hereafter. It is either blessing or cursing. The Psalmist, therefore, in this verse, prays for the fullest sense of pardon ; not merely forgiveness, but positive and perfect re-acceptance : not merely for admission into God's presence, but for a welcome reception there : not only that sin should be purged away from his heart, but that joy and gladness should take the place of gloom and sorrow. He knows God's ways. He knows, now that he has come to himself, that when he returns to his Father's house he will never be put in a servant's place, but reinstated in his own son's corner. He knows that the fatted calf will be killed, and that friends will be summoned to make merry and be glad. So he prays for what God has promised to give him—joy and gladness. Out from the lowest depths of adultery, and murder, and hot, red-handed sin would he come, and come not to the surface of

the earth merely, but up even to heaven ; and not merely brought in, but brought in with joy and gladness, to be set down in the highest places, among the brightest ones : up among the blood-washed sons of God : up to his Saviour's side ; for thus alone can he fully honour that blood where-with he has been washed and made whiter than snow.

“What presumption is this ; what fanaticism ; what a foolish dream and delusion is here !” It is not so. It is nothing more than the plain, simple fact. Here is no fanaticism, no exaggeration, no delusion. As God is true, this is, or may be, true to you. But you say, If I am to come for pardon in my own name, I must come cautiously. I must come waiting and begging, and it may be I shall get it bit by bit. And after I have been pardoned, I need to work, and watch diligently for every gleam of sunshine on a father's face, and I can never make sure and certain of it : and it is wrong and presumptuous to speak of certainty. I must labour hard for every smile of favour I receive ; and, indeed, need hardly expect a smile of true favour

and love at all. At best I can only expect to get this when I deserve it; and to deserve it, I must double my diligence, must work, and watch, and wait, with the quick eye, and ready, steady hand of a slave. I may succeed, at last, in reinstating myself in past favours: in regaining by slow degrees the position I had lost: but this I can only expect after a time, if ever, and with much zealous and effective service, much alms, many tears and prayers, and much penitence.

But this is not the gospel, nor anything like it. It is a vile jumble, which you will not find in the Word of God. This is the way in which man is, by man, reconciled to man. It is not the way in which man, by the God-man, is reconciled to God. Man is reconciled to man, generally, on account of some transaction between the offended parties: but man is reconciled to God on the ground of something done by God, and not by man: on the ground of a work begun, and ended, by a mediator, a peacemaker, a substitute for the guilty ones. All that we get from God is got on that ground alone. All that we get for ourselves, and for the worst and the best of our own doings

equally, is condemnation. All our righteousnesses are but rags, filthy rags. They deserve and demand only condemnation. We get all that we get on the ground of a past work. The reasons for God's giving us any good thing are all long ago concluded and finished. What we get is got on the ground of a payment long ago made, and therefore we can take it all at once, without waiting. On the ground of a work altogether ended by another, we take what God offers, and that is, a finished salvation. And the more we take, the more glory do we bring to this finished work. The more we take from God, the more do we empty ourselves in the very act of taking it. And in taking from Him, we are giving to Him: we are giving glory to His grace and goodness, to His Son and His work. What *we* take, God gets: the more we take from Him, the more do we give to Him. It is not presumption, therefore, but wisdom, and faithful trusting in God, and honouring and glorifying Him, to come to Him, even were it fresh from the committal of a great sin, to seek, and to take, full joy and gladness, and to have it, not as the result and ending, but as the beginning of a process: so that the very bones

which God has broken may rejoice. The man who has once tasted gospel-joy and gladness, cannot be content without it. He who never tasted joy and gladness, has never yet tasted God's salvation. Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God. And not only so, but we also joy in God, by whom we have now received the atonement.

David speaks here of his bones being broken. He says that God did it. The bone, and bones, frequently, in the Hebrew idiom, signify strength. The meaning of God's having broken the bones of David is, that He brought down his strength. His iniquities took such a hold upon him, he was so tossed and troubled in his heart, that his strength broke down. Do we not see here a case parallel to the "prostration" of which we have recently heard so much? Was not David "struck?" Was he not "prostrated" mentally and bodily, by an overwhelming sense of the awful nature of sin, of God's holy indignation against it, of those terrors of the Lord which persuade men? But he would be brought out of that state. The very bones which are broken must be made to sing for joy.

Many, of their own experience, can testify that



this is hardly a Hebrew idiom : hardly any figure of speech, but a simple and stern literality. To many men this clause of the verse needs no commentary other than their own experience. Dark days, and weary nights of weeping, have been appointed to them. They have made their couch to swim with their tears ; they have been unable to eat their bread : all God's waves and billows have rolled and broken over them. God is a reality. Sin is a reality. Hell is a reality. Heaven and holiness are realities. I, I have sinned against Thee. I have trampled on the blood of the Lord Jesus. A sight of that loving, bleeding heart : a gleam of that mild, sweet face : a feeling of nearness to Him in the suffering of all His pale woe and agony ; and yet I am not Christ's : I am a sinner under God's wrath. Ah, how deep down these convictions of sin do go ! what bitter things a man will write against himself ! how small, and paltry, and utterly contemptible the world, and all that is in it, does look ! A wounded spirit who can bear ? Days and days pass away, and there is no rest for the troubled soul. He possesses no power of grasping the Strong One. All is darkness and the shadow of

death. Set a man to pray now, to pray in simple faith, and will it be a figure of speech for him to say, "The bones which thou hast broken?"

Yet how swiftly the broken bones do heal up, when God speaks the word; how soon do they rejoice and sing for joy! When God takes off His hand: when the cloud breaks, and His reconciled face is seen, how soon do the broken bones begin to sing, and joy and gladness fill the whole heart!

There is neither joy nor gladness but in God. There is a semblance of them in the world. There is a surface joy, the mere ripple of the sunny waves of the great sea; but the whole depth of water below is dark and motionless. A joy there is, that passes for such in the world: deny it not: to deny it were to speak foolishly; but it is shallow and hollow, the noisy laughter of the fool. It is not the light that comes gushing down in streams of love from God's great sun in the heavens. It is light; but it is not that. It is the gleam that hovers by night over the marshy places; or it is the pale glimmer that shoots up, and plays ghastly around the lineaments of the dead. God is the source and fountain of joy: only the man who has

joy in God knows what joy means. Unconverted men laugh with half their mind, or with half their heart. Their whole being does not laugh. Their conscience does not laugh. Their memory does not laugh. Their reason does not laugh. They cannot laugh till their eyes are shut. They cannot look at God, and be glad. They cannot look down into the deep cuts and red earth of the grave, and be glad. They cannot look into the face of death, and hear the grim rattle of the bony skeleton, and be glad. They cannot look down into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death, and feel any joy. They cannot open their eyes on the great white throne, see the judgment set, the books opened, the leaves turned over for their name, and yet feel glad, their hearts still beating with a calm, joyous, equable pulse. Are they glad when they are sick? Are they glad when they are alone, when all is dark, and no eye is open over them but the eye of God? Are they glad when they are dying? Have they a desire to depart and to be with Christ? And yet the men of this world speak as if they had a monopoly of joy: as if ours were the gloom, and theirs the gladness. They speak as if it

were a sufficient reason for a man to stay in their ranks because, say they, when you go over to the ranks of the saints you leave all joy behind you. What a cunning lie of the old serpent it is! How many thousand silly ones has he caught fast in that snare! Lie! it is a double lie. The gloom is theirs, the gladness ours. Men who have tried both sides know it well; and they know it by the remembrance of their broken bones. Out of God then, beyond God and His favour, there is neither joy nor gladness: and, therefore, David goes to the source seeking it. Make Thou me to hear joy and gladness.

Pardon of sin, alone, ought to produce these good fruits. Sin is the great curse; it is sin that breaks hearts and digs graves, and sends sickness and sorrow, and all distress, disaster, and death. When sin is pardoned, the source of sorrow is dried up; it may continue to flow for a time, but it will soon cease. No man has a right to be glad till sin is pardoned. Men who are going down to hell have no right to dance and be merry. What is all that a man has, and can get, of joy worth, if he is dancing about with the wrath and curse of God hanging like a millstone around his neck? Do men dance

in the condemned cell? We hear of strange words spoken, and strange scenes enacted there: do we hear of joy and of gladness? He that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him. Let men who speak of joy look at that dread truth, and smile, if they can.

If God thus breaks the bones of His own pardoned and beloved children, what shall be the fate of His enemies? If judgment begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If the green branches hiss and smoke thus, when only brought near the flames, what shall be the end of the dry and sapless branches when they are cast into the fire to be burned? And if all this be so in this world, what shall it be in the next? My bones are broken.

I close my remarks on this verse, and add those of David Dickson, which are to the point:—"1. The grief and torment which follow sin, and are felt by a wounded spirit, even in the children of God, in the time of their repentance, are greater than ever the pleasure of sin was to them, as David sheweth here,

who speaketh of his vexation and wounded spirit as of the painfullest trouble which can fall upon the body : for by 'the bones which thou hast broken,' he meaneth the chastisement of his spirit inflicted by God. 2. Nothing can heal this wound of the spirit, save the hand that made it ; nothing but God's lively application of His word of grace and pardon to the guilty sinner can do it : for David will not rest with what Nathan had spoken, till God speak the same effectually unto him : 'Make me to hear joy and gladness.' 3. As there is no sorrow so deep as the sense of God's displeasure, so there is no joy so refreshing as the inward consolation of God's Spirit ; for David's broken bones will rejoice, if God speak peace to his soul : 'Make me to hear,' " &c.\*

\* The Hebrew word here rendered "gladness," occurs in Ps. xliii. 4, "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God *my exceeding joy* ;" literally it is as on the margin, "unto God, the *gladness* of my joy : " for all my springs are in Thee.

VER. 9. *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out  
all mine iniquities.*

“As if he had said, ‘Seeing my sin is ever before me (ver. 3), let it not be before Thee: but do Thou hide Thy face, not from me, but from my sins.’” \* Still it is the same cry; only another variation of the old tune. It is easy to sin: not so easy to get rid of it, and its effects. Sin is pleasant at the time of committal; yet it worketh wrath: it bringeth woe. Again and again does David repeat this earnest, heartfelt cry, Mercy, mercy. It is no vain repetition. It is the cry of the woman of Canaan; it is the prayer of Jacob—“I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.” The desire of the heart finds expression in the words of the mouth. That is true prayer. It is generally contrary to the rules of rhetoric: its arrangement does not always follow the method of the logician. It often vio-

\* Annotations, &c. By Arthur Jackson, Preacher of God's Word at Faith's under Paul's. London, 1658.



lates the rules of the grammarian. Its sentences are incomplete; for the groanings cannot always be uttered. Three times the Lord Jesus prayed, with strong crying and tears, and used the same words. "Seek and ye shall find," means simply, seek till ye find. If a man does not find, it is because his seeking is incomplete. Again and again comes this petition for mercy all through the psalm; the thought the same, the desire one, the words alone varied. But all this variety in unity teaches us to know how the Psalmist's heart had been exercised about his sin. He had seen it in all lights and in all shades. Hence, when he speaks, it is out of the abundance of his heart; and while the thought of his mind and the desire of his heart is one, it is a many-sided unity.

God's face is on our sins. The holy eye rests on them all. Man does not see them. They are done quietly, cunningly, secretly. At dead of night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, at a time when every eye of man is removed from us, the sin is committed. Every precaution is taken to avoid observation. All footmarks are carefully obliterated. It is done in the secrecy of our own heart.



Human eye never saw it: human ear never heard it. It was concealed from the face of all living. But thou God seest me. Thine eye was upon me. Men have forgotten it, if they ever saw, or heard, or knew. But it is all always before Thy face. The darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day. Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. Hence David's prayer, *Hide Thy face*; hide it not from me, but from my sins. Turn Thy back on my sins, so shall Thy face shine upon me.

Blot out *all* mine iniquities. The accurate knowledge of one sin, or one set of sins, brings forth all our other sins into the light of our own countenance. And it is when our own face is fully turned to them, that we feel that God's eye is upon them. So long as we are engaged about the sin, we never think of God. When we forget our sin, we feel as if God had forgotten it also. When God sets our sins in array before us, then we not only see them ourselves, but we see them in the light of God's countenance, and see that He is beholding them also. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence;

thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." When God does so, we feel that they are all set in order before His eyes also, and then we pray, Hide Thy face from my sins.

All our iniquities are recorded: therefore does the Psalmist here pray, Blot out all mine iniquities. There is a book of remembrance. God keeps it. Does He keep it on His own side? Where, and what, is the book of remembrance? Every man has one such book at least within himself. There are many well-authenticated cases that go far to prove, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that we really do forget nothing of all we have ever seen or known, all that we have ever been or done. You have forgotten a thing utterly, as you think: but first one scene and then another brightens slowly, gradually up, like a photographic picture coming out under the manipulations of the operator, till finally the whole past again stands clear before you. You thought that it was gone, but it needed only a little patient effort to call it forth. There have been many men apparently drowned, who remember their successive sensations under the water, till all grew a black

blank, from which, as from annihilation, with a sharp, sudden spasm of pain, they awoke to consciousness. The experience is nearly uniform, that just before the extinction of consciousness, all the events of the past life rush swiftly, yet vividly, before the mind's eye, as if the book were not only opened, but *read*. Were it needful, the writer of these pages could add, from his own experience, one testimony more to the overwhelming evidence. He, too, knows the meaning of the opening of this book. But there is another record. Sin is not only remembered by us, it is remembered by God. He knows it all, remembers it all. It is all in the book of His remembrance. Hence the prayer, *Blot out*. Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blot it out. Erase it from Thy book of remembrance.

There is but one thing that can cover sin : one thing only that can blot it out of our book, and out of God's book. They who are sprinkled with the blood of Christ have no more conscience of sins. They can forget them when they are thus covered. The sea, as it rolls upon the shore, washes away all the lines and figures that a boy makes on the sand.

As surely, and as certainly, does the blood of Christ wash out, and cover over, all the sin-stains on a guilty conscience. God forgets. No words can express the fulness of the forgive and the forget. God speaks of casting our sins behind His back. They are to be carried into the wilderness, and no more brought to mind. They are to be cast into the depths of the sea.

If God does not hide His face from our sins in this world, He will have His eye upon them and us through all eternity : if He does not blot them out here, they will not be blotted out hereafter. This earth is the scene and stage of God's mercy. Men who never tasted God's mercy here, and who never sought it, die trusting vaguely to the "mercy of God." It is a vain delusion. The record closes with these words : they are nearly the very last : "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." After death is the judgment, and then eternity. God pardons sin, and blots out

iniquity, here and now. The death of Christ puts that beyond all manner of doubt, if only we understand its meaning well: but there can be as little doubt that death ends the day of grace: and that there is neither work nor device in the grave, whither thou goest.



VER. 10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and  
renew a right spirit within me.*

WE can see here another proof that the penitence of this man is God-given ; that it is repentance which needeth not to be repented of. He is not satisfied with mercy, and pardon, and blotting out. It is not enough that God forgives this sin. It is not enough that while God forgives this evil, He breaks the bond between the man and the punishment. To a true penitent, sin is death : and death in sin is hell. So long, therefore, as the fountain is left to pour forth its unclean waters, mere pardon is of little avail. Out of this evil heart are still proceeding murders, and adulteries, and thefts, and all sins. They *proceed* from the heart : and whether they come out or not makes but little matter, for they are all in. A true penitent goes to the source : he would stop the evil stream at its beginning : he would lay the axe at the root of the tree : Create, says he, in me a clean, that is a pure, heart.

This word "create" has been a wonder to many. But the word is genuine. It admits of no other translation. It is the same Hebrew word which you find standing in all its majesty in the first verse of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. It is the same word for "God," and the same word for "create," in both verses. The same God must work in the self-same way, with the self-same power. But why does David ask God to create a clean heart within him? Was he not already born again? Had he not already had a new, and so a clean heart: and did it need more than simply washing? David knows better than such questioners. He has committed sin: he has lived in sin, and loved it: and the effect of that upon his soul has been disastrous. There is no power in him to remedy or rectify it. It must come from without: it must come from God: it must come by a sovereign act and forth-putting of power altogether similar to God's act of creation. No power in David can put away that sin. No power in him can remedy the evil that sin has wrought within him.\* No power of man, no

\* "Whence it follows that the whole heart of man, when it is considered in its own nature, is crooked and untoward. For if there were any uprightness or cleanness in it by nature, David



power of priest, no prayers or penitence, on his part, can make him as he was, what he was. God must do it by an act of sovereign power. The God who created the world, and made man, must come and do this thing. He alone can remedy the evil which sin has caused. A child can cast a stone among the teeth of the wheels of some piece of delicate mechanism whilst it is revolving rapidly: he has but to stand still, with folded hands, and lo! the work of self-destruction goes on. The child cannot undo the effects of that stone-throwing. The artisan who made the machine may feel that he is only able to mend it, so to speak, by replacing it. Sin is easy: not so the remedy of sin. The work of destruction is always easier than the work of reparation. It is an easy matter to swallow a bit of poisoned food: it is not so easy to undo the dire effects of it. It is easy to kindle a great conflagration: it is a work of toil and trouble to subdue the flames. A building which took a century to rear, polish, and finish, may be reduced to ashes in a day. David's sin was an easy thing: its effects on others was death: its effects on himself were dreadful.

would not term the latter *the gift of the Spirit*, and the former *God's creation*."—*Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms*, in loc.

He has a broken heart, and broken bones.\* God must begin again at the very beginning. And it is not simply to create something out of nothing: a word of His can do that. But if we can speak of difficulty in connexion with the name of God, here is a difficult thing. A word of God's cannot speak the sin of David out of being. A word of God's cannot put a pure heart into this adulterous man. In this case there must first be blood shed, or the sin, consistently with the nature of God, cannot be eradicated. And all the blood of bulls and goats cannot do it. This man must die for ever, through all eternity: or God in His wisdom must find out another way. When the blood of God's own Son has been shed, then God can cleanse away all stains of sin from David's guilty conscience. And when that is done, and on the ground of Christ's finished work, God can create a clean heart even here. All this, David, taught of God's Spirit, knows right well; and hence he seeks a new creation. God, who at first did cause the light to shine out of darkness, must

\* "A finger's breadth at hand will mar  
A world of light in heaven afar,  
A mote obscure yon glowing star,  
An eyelid hide the sky."—KEBLE.

shine in his heart, else there never can be any more the light of life there: and it is for this that he longs and prays. A deep sense of the impurity of sin, a deep sense of its polluting power, makes a man loathe and abhor himself, and long, and pant, and pray for purity and cleanness. How the sick man envies the flushed cheek and the buoyant step of robust health, as he gazes forth upon it from his solitary sick-chamber! And when a man's thoughts are raised to God, to the white, pure, and holy ones in heaven, before His throne, how he longs to be like them! Create in me a clean heart, O God.

“He prays for sanctifying grace; and this every true penitent is as earnest for as for pardon and peace. He doth not pray, Lord, preserve me my reputation; as Saul, ‘I have sinned, yet honour me before this people.’ No, his great concern is to get his corrupt nature changed. The sin he had been guilty of was an evidence of his heart's impurity, and therefore he prays, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God.’ He now saw more than ever what an unclean heart he had, and sadly laments it, but sees it is not in his power to amend it, and therefore begs of God (whose prerogative it is to

create), that He would create in him a clean heart. He only that made the heart can new-make it ; and to His power nothing is impossible. He created the world by the word of His power, as the God of nature ; and it is by the word of His power, as the God of grace, that we are made clean ; that we are sanctified." \*

Still, observe, he will be at the roots and sources of the disease. Freedom from punishment is one step : entire pardon is another : purging from sin, and cleansing away the spots and blots from the heart is more, farther, better still ; but he comes here to the very root of the evil, the heart itself : the fountain must be purified as well as the streams : the root must be madē good, though the branches are all pruned. It is the heart that is the seat of sin : it was bred there : temptation found its friend and ally there : it is the heart, therefore, that needs rectifying, and David will rest with nothing short of that. He is content with no surface work : no mere reformation, no mere re-direction, or re-distribution of the old materials will do ; there must be a new creation, a positive making

\* Matt. Henry, *Commentary in loc.*

new, a putting there what now is not there. It is not any mere bending, and cleansing, and straightening of the already existing powers; it is that, but it is also a calling into being of powers and principles that now are not within me. It is "create." God alone can do that: Create, O God, a clean heart: it is a new heart, but let it be clean and pure, free from these principles of sin and roots of bitterness: it is a heart with lust left out: a heart with all desires of the fleshly mind left out: a heart which, being clean, may be kept clean: a heart, clean from the beginning, and which, therefore, by the grace of God, may be kept whiter than snow. This is what he feels his need of, and what he therefore prays for.

“ ‘And renew a right spirit within me.’ Begin again, O God, that Thy very work which Thou hadst begun in me, and is left off because I had letted\* it (namely the pureness of my heart, of the which Thou art the only author and creator), and renew those holy motions of my heart within me.” †

\* Hindered.

† The Psalms of David truly opened and explained by Paraphrases according to the true sense of every Psalm, &c., set forth in Latin by that excellent learned man Theodore Beza, and faithfully translated into English by Anthonie Gilbie. At London, 1580.

"I rather conceive it hath reference to his former piety, which he now found greatly decayed in him, wherewith he desires to be established again." \*

"A right spirit is such a spirit as God requires, and takes pleasure in ; and such a spirit as becomes the condition of those who profess to be His followers. It would be easy to prove that such a spirit must be a spirit of faith and trust : a spirit of contrition and humility : a spirit of thankfulness : a spirit of love : a spirit of patience and submission : a spirit of zeal : and a spirit of firmness and constancy. Such is the spirit produced in all the subjects of Divine grace. . . . We are never happy but as we have a right spirit within us. But we here learn that when it is impaired, it is God alone who can renew it. He giveth *more* grace. He is the God of *all* grace. As He begins, so He carries on the good work. He strengthens that which He wrought in us. He perfects that which concerns us." † This is the prayer, Create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit : make the tree good, and its fruit also good : it is a clean heart and a fixed

\* Annotations, &c., by Arthur Jackson, 1658.

† Rev. W. Jay: Morning and Evening Exercises. Lond., 1842.

basis on which all rests, from which all proceeds: the right spirit is the progress and the result: especially it is the result. He prays that it might be renewed. It is only thorough work with which he will be contented. In all matters that concern the salvation of the soul this ought ever to be the case. We should give *all* diligence, we should make our calling and election *sure*.

“Albeit sin against the conscience, in a renewed man, defileth it thoroughly, and defaceth the work of the Holy Spirit; openeth the floodgate of natural corruption to the pollution of the whole frame of a holy heart; openeth the way unto, and strengthens the work of an evil and deluding spirit; yet no principle of grace is able to remove this evil, but the removing and remedying of it must be by the immediate work of God's own omnipotent hand. This work is no less than creation, therefore saith he, ‘Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me:’ that is, It is not in my power to clear my conscience and my polluted heart, or to set my perverted spirit in a right frame again, but Thy creating and renewing power, which borroweth



nothing from the creature, must do it: 'Create in me' importeth this." \*

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." This is one of our Lord's brief comments on this passage. Blessed are the pure in heart: not blessed are the rich, the great, the noble, the kingly men: David possessed all these things. He had a crown: his dominion was stable, over a mighty, a prosperous, an obedient, and a loving people: he had all that wealth could buy and power could bring; but all that was as nothing, less and worse than nothing: all that was only an aggravation of his evil position: at the centre of his being there was a virus, a vile poison clung to his soul, at the very roots of his life; and hence his prayer, a clean heart. Without this, a man shall never see God in peace. He may get a great many things without a pure heart: he may acquire, and long keep, much wealth: a thousand joys and pleasures of a sort may gratify his soul withal; but a sharp-cut end comes: he is hurled out into another world; and God is before him: if there is sin on his soul

\* David Dickson.



uncovered, God's face he cannot see, but in fear and terror.

Whatever is good in us must come straight from God. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. All man-made religion looks infinitely little and contemptible beside this manifestation of God's religion: a royal penitent on his face before God, his bones all broken with a sense of his sin, crying out for a clean heart, and a right spirit. Had there been help in any other quarter, David could have got it: but there is none. There is no other hand that can help: no other eye that can pity: no other heart out of which compassion for the lost can come. Lord, unto whom shall we go but unto Thee? Thou only hast the words of eternal life. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Who is a God like unto Thee that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy.

The word in Hebrew, here rendered "right,"

means, literally, *firm, fixed, established*. This is what David seeks. It is a heart so strengthened, stablished, and confirmed, that it will not again fall into sin. He has had experience of himself now, and knows how frail and feeble he is, and that he goes down flat to the dust before the sweep of the blast of the first temptation; and so he would be made strong: he knows that God alone can do this. It is only when God holds us up that we are safe. If we are to be strong, it can only be in the Lord, and in the power of His might. God must *not* only make, but keep us strong. Nevertheless I am *continually* with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand: Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.





VER. 11. *Cast me not away from thy presence ;  
and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.*

THIS petition brings out into bold relief another notable difference between nature and grace, unbelief and faith. Grace seeks ever to be in the presence of God : nature avoids God : God's presence is hateful and wearisome. The first effect of sin was visible in this, that Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. This is Adam's answer to God's question, *Where art thou ?* I heard Thy voice in the garden : and I was afraid, *because* I was naked : and then—I hid myself. He cast himself away from God's presence. And Cain also went out from the presence of the Lord. This is the constant effect of sin : to make the presence of the Lord frightful and hateful to the sinner. The peace of a sinner consists chiefly in his being able to forget God : more or less effectually to hide himself from God : to be away, consciously to him-

self, from the face and presence of God. Sin, in the heart of a sinner, says to God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. Sin is the soul of death. Sin is to be away from the presence of God ; to be away from before Him, and out in the darkness of death. To get rid of God, is the sinner's paradise: he is nearest his peace when he is furthest from God. Hence the expedients men devise to keep God out of their thoughts. Some go so far as to try the mechanical method: opium will do it, and strong drink will do it: they destroy the whole framework of the mind and body, and shorten the short span of life: they are costly expedients, but they serve their end. Hence also men avoid all reading that would remind them forcibly, and convincingly, of God. They are glad of any tissue of cobweb argument that will seem to prove that God is not, or that He is not the God who is revealed to us in the Bible, and in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence also men studiously avoid the reverent utterance of the name of God. They get round it by all manner of periphrases. They will speak, when they *must* speak of God, of "Heaven," and of "Providence," and of "Nature," and of the

*and of the Deity," and of the Powers above;*  
"Great Being;" but God's own holy and beautiful name they will not utter with a reverential thought of who, and what, and where He is. Every scheme is tried to nurse forgetfulness of God into a confirmed habit of the heart. No blank time is left: every spare corner is filled up with light thinking, light speaking, light reading, or some other frivolity and folly. The world is taken fully in. All the cares, anxieties, troubles, and pleasures of it are taken so fully into the heart that God is entirely shut out. God is not in all their thoughts: we might say that God, the only living and true God, is not in any of their thoughts. Men can pray, and yet not have God in their thoughts: men can praise, can read the Bible, and yet not have the true God ever once before them: they can sit in a church, and look reverently, and devoutly, and yet not have a single solid thought of God. And when God is most fully shut out, then their peace is perfect: then they say, Peace, peace: but there is no peace: for there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

The very reverse of all this is the case where the life of God is active in the soul. The cry of the

living, loving, longing heart, in a time of desertion, or of darkness is, Cast me not away from Thy presence. O God, whatever Thou doest, do not that. Punish me as Thou wilt, even as I deserve if Thou wilt: let me be kept in pain, and misery, and sorrow if Thou wilt, but cast me not away from Thy presence. Whatever I have to suffer, let me suffer it in Thee, with Thee, before Thee, for then I can bear it; but cast me not away from Thy presence, for that I cannot bear. To be away from Thee is death: it is death, dark, drear, dismal: to be away from Thee is to be shut up in the darkness of despair, and silence, and oblivion. It is solitary imprisonment continued through eternity: it is to be shut up in outer darkness, away from all love, and life, and beauty, and holiness. It is to be silent and still as the grave: than this better far to be chained on a solitary rock in a desert island in the middle of the ocean: than this better to be shut up in a prison cell deep down in the bowels of the earth, the door locked, the key sunk in the sea, and the place forgotten of men: than this better to be buried alive, and left to die in a solitary grave, unwept, unpitied, and unremembered for ever. Even hell



itself is not worse than this, for this is the substance and the sum of all possible evil for the creature, to be cast away for ever from the presence of the Creator, and left to the companionships that follow from it. This is hell : this its essence. For this is the sum of hell, on the one side. This is all that it wants, the presence of the good and holy God, and all that flows from that. Surely this is worse than the other side : this absence is worse than the presence : the presence of an angry God taking vengeance for sin. At all events this is hell to a living heart, to be even for a season deprived of the comfortable presence of God.

This is a confession. It says, I deserve to be cast out from Thy presence as another Cain, a murderer and a vagabond. Sin pollutes me : sin unfits me for the presence of God, and all holy ones : but, O God, do Thou create a clean heart within me, and cast me not away from Thy presence. As I am, there is nothing for it but casting out ; but when Thou hast purged me, washed me, created a clean heart in me, then shall I be again fit for Thy presence : so, O Lord, cast me not away from Thy presence : but create a clean heart within me, and

let me abide before Thee, and again rejoice in the light of Thy countenance.

“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” It is by the Spirit that we are brought into contact with, and kept near to God. It is by the Spirit that God makes Himself known to us: for it is by the Spirit that He reveals Christ to us and Christ in us: and it is he who has thus seen Christ that has seen the Father. Thus, through Him, we have access by one Spirit unto the Father; and thus our fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, and with the Holy Ghost. It is by the same Spirit that all Heaven’s gifts come down: by Him also do all our gifts and praises go up. It is by Him that the blood of Christ is applied to our souls: by Him that we are justified and sanctified: by Him that we receive the adoption of children, and are sealed unto the day of redemption. It is by this isthmus, so to speak, that our little island of humanity, the little peninsula of humanity which each of us is, holds communion, is held in contact, keeps up communication, with the great continent which God is. Cut off this, and we are isolated for ever. Cut off this communication, and we are for ever

surrounded with a shoreless, fathomless, tideless sea of death. Take not therefore Thy Holy Spirit from me. That would be to leave me alone, to sink down, and down, and down to the depths of that pit which is ever bottomless. To take Thy Holy Spirit from me, would be to banish me to a desert island of the sea where no ship ever lands, no life ever comes. Take from me, therefore, what Thou wilt : take from me crown, and kingdom, and all my royal state and dignity : strip me of all Thou ever gavest me : send me back to the plains of Bethlehem to feed my father's sheep again : yea, strip me still closer, and send me forth a houseless and a homeless man, to beg my bread from door to door ; but leave me this blessed Spirit : take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Let my name be a scorn, and a hissing, and a byword among men, if Thou wilt : leave me only life and nothing more, if Thou wilt have it so ; but let there be a clean heart, and a right spirit, and Thy presence, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and then a dungeon will be a palace.

To think how men do resist, strive against, and grieve this Holy Spirit of our God ! How they do

beat against Him, tempting, provoking Him to let them alone! How they do frantically pull, and tug, and use every means to wear out the rope that binds them to the safe shore, and that would land them there, the only fastening that keeps them from drifting swiftly down time's short, rapid current, and out into the shoreless sea of a desolate and undone eternity! What emphasis there is in these brief precepts, Quench not the Spirit: grieve not the Spirit: resist not the Spirit. After He has finally departed, what have we left? After He is gone, how much is there between us and the endurance of the second death?

There has been a question raised and argued, in connexion with this verse, about the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. Those who deny that doctrine argue thus: "David prays that God may not cast him away from His presence: therefore a man who has been dwelling in God's presence *may* be cast out of it. He prays, Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me: therefore a man may have the Holy Spirit, and lose Him, and therefore be himself lost." That is the way they argue; and it is poor arguing. It proceeds on the false assumption, that we

are not to ask what God has promised to give. The very reverse of that is true : for we are to ask only what God has promised to give. And if it be true that no man shall ever pluck Christ's sheep out of His hand and His Father's : if it be true that He who hath begun a good work in us will also perfect it : or simply, if the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints be true, then we are to proceed on its truth, and ask God to do what we know He will do : we are to ask Him not to do what we know He will not do : not to cast us out from His presence, for example : not to take His Holy Spirit from us. We are to ask these things because we know that God will grant them ; to do, or not to do, according to His own promise.

But the truth is, that this question should never be argued by a mere quotation of texts, on this side, and on that. To deny this doctrine is to assert entire ignorance of the faith and hope of God's elect. It is to prove that he who denies it, is ignorant of the nature of God, of the nature of His gospel, more specially of the nature of regeneration, and of justification, and of adoption. Shew me that you understand the nature of regeneration, that

it is a being born again of incorruptible seed : that you understand the nature of justification, that therein our sins are blotted out, and we are made righteous with all the righteousness of God : that you understand the nature of adoption, as being a translation out of the kingdom of darkness into that of God's dear Son, from being a son of the devil and a child of wrath, to be a son, and child, and heir of God, and joint-heir with the Lord Jesus Christ : shew me, I say, that you understand these things, and are resting them on a broad and intelligent knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and I will not argue the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints with you. It is then a simple corollary which suggests itself from the proposition, and flows naturally out of it. It does so, though there were no express statements of it in the Word (but there are), and though from every book, and from every chapter in every book, you could produce me a text that *seems* to be inconsistent with it, and *seems* to contradict it.

But it is not our place here to prove the truth of this doctrine. All we have to do is, simply, to unhook and fling off the heresy that has cast its



moorings around this verse. We have only to point out that the whole chain of argument depends on the one link, that we are not to pray for what we are perfectly certain to get: that is what the whole depends upon, and it has but to be stated, and it is answered. You need not take down every stone in an arch if you want to demolish it: take out the key-stone, and then leave it to itself. You need not break every link of the chain by which a ship is made fast to the land on that river's side, and you need not trouble yourself to go down into the water to get at a link which is hidden there: break the link nearest you, on the dry land, and leave her alone, and when the tide rises and flows, she will drift quietly down, giving you no more trouble.

We give here the comment of David Dickson on the verse: it is to the point. "Albeit a renewed soul cannot be utterly cast off from God, nor be bereft utterly of saving grace once bestowed on him; yet if he grieve the Lord's Spirit by presumptuous sinning, his assurance of standing in God's favour may be mightily brangled,\* and be put in fear of losing the possession of what is behind of the sav-

\* Disturbed, shaken, put out of joint.

ing work of God's Spirit in him, especially when he considereth that his provocation doth deserve no less at God's hands: therefore saith he, 'Cast me not,' &c.

This is a quickening doctrine, that we are continually in God's presence, one way or other, either in love or in wrath. The thing which the Psalmist seeks is, the light of God's countenance. He knows well that he is never out of God's presence in one way: he has just said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this evil in thy sight*." But he wants to be in God's presence in another way than he was then. It should quicken us to feel that we are always in God's presence, either as sons beloved, or as rebellious sons, or as unbelievers with the wrath of God abiding on us. His eye is ever upon us. And it should be comfort to us in all our affliction. When we are misunderstood: when we are misrepresented: when we do not get the reward which is our due, but, instead of it, get a blame that we never deserved: let this thought be a comfort to us in all these, and all the like afflictions, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee."

It is only sin that casts us out from God's pre-



sence : it was sin that drove Adam out of Eden, and away from constant communion with God : we have but to cast sin out of our presence, and we will never be cast out of God's : we have, but to turn our back on sin, and our face is toward God and His face is toward us. It was sin, and continuance in sin, that made such a saint of God feel this desert darkness. It was sin that made God, hide His face of love from him : the sin put away, God returns : the darkness past, the true light again shineth.


It is the choicest wine of the whole vintage; to dwell constantly in the presence of God : to do, and speak, and work, all in His presence : to go in the strength of it everywhere : to have this light about one wherever one goes, whatever one does : it is the joy of earth, it is the glory of heaven. " Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be *with me* in paradise." That is all, *with me* : Lord, to be with thee is paradise. " Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be *with me* where I am." And this is the apostle's summing up of all good : " and so shall we ever be *with the Lord*." That is all, to lean where John did : to behold His

glory, and share in it. This is heaven : but it begins on earth. Only they who dwell in His presence here shall be with Him hereafter. Heaven begins on earth if it ever does begin. It is only he that is holy that is to be holy still. All the white-robed ones came "out of great tribulation : " once they were all filthy : once they were all so foul as to need washing : but they all washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and *therefore* stand they before the throne of God. "Nevertheless I am continually *with thee*."

I add a word out of Samuel Smith, which is to the purpose, and pass to the next verse. "Seeing that it is so great and fearful a judgment to be cast out of the Lord's favour and gracious presence, oh, what madmen be they that make so light of God's love and favour, that will, for the gaining of a penny or two, or the enjoying of an hour's pleasure, lose the love and favour of the Lord Almighty; and for ever deprive themselves of His glorious presence, and plunge both body and soul into everlasting woe and misery with the devil and his angels!"

Again "Seeing the enjoying of God's presence is so happy and comfortable, and to be deprived of it

is so grievous and terrible, how should we use all means to get into His favour if we want it, and keep it if we have it! In Thy presence is the fulness of joy, and in Thy sight we shall see light. And because sin thrusts men out of God's presence, and separates between God and man, above all things, take heed of sin, avoid it, and shun it, as the bane of our souls."





VER. 12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ;  
and uphold me with thy free Spirit.*

HE uses the word "restore:" that means, give me back a thing I once had, but which I have for the present consciously lost. It does not follow that a man is not always in a saved state because he does not always *know* that he is so. My salvation depends on something better, surer, than my knowing that I am saved. My salvation depends on the state of God's mind toward me, which never changes: not on the state of my mind towards God, which is as changeable as the fitful breeze.

But he does not pray, "Restore unto me thy salvation." He does not offer that prayer: that would imply that he had for the time lost the salvation; and would be a denial of the perseverance of the saints. If a man has to pray, "Restore me thy salvation," then that tells us that he had lost it: and if it is once lost, it *may* never be regained; and

so a saint may be lost. But this penitent seeks back nothing more than that which he has lost. He has not lost God's salvation, he has only lost the *joy* of it : and therefore he prays only for a restoration of what he has lost ; what he once had, and has not now. Restore unto me the *joy* of Thy salvation.

God's salvation cannot be lost, because God will not permit it to be lost. I grasp a drowning man, and, after struggling long, feel that my strength is exhausted, and know that I must either let go my hold or die with the drowning one. When God lays hold of a man, He never again leaves go : His strength is never exhausted : He brings the man safe to the thither shore. We may let Him go, but He does not let us go : we may deny Him for a time, yet He abideth faithful : He cannot deny Himself. God is able and willing. I never finally lose my hold of God, simply because God never lets go His hold on me. Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.

Although the salvation cannot be lost, the good of it in this world may : the "joy" of it, the conscious joy in the possession of it, may. A

man cannot have the joy of God's salvation, and the joy of sin together. These two things will not abide together in the same heart. As no man can serve two masters, so no man can be paid by two masters. If a man lives long in the enjoyment of sin, one thing is very clear : he never was in possession of God's salvation. If he thought he was, he was surely mistaken. It is not possible. The joy of salvation is a delicate and a tender plant. It is easily made to wither and decay. It will only grow in a holy heart. The sun shines all day, though it is not always visible. Clouds and fogs rise up from this dim earth, and hide the joy of his shining face from us. If we would keep the joy of God's salvation, we must part with sin, and all its joys. If we find pleasure in sin, we have lost joy in God : and it is only when sin is thrust out, that the bright morning dawns again, and joy returns unto the clean heart.

A man may have the salvation without the joy of it : he may have the thing, and yet have lost the peaceful, joyful possession of the thing. Yet it is of the nature of the salvation that it has joy as an essential part of it. And not only so, but we also joy in



God. To speak of salvation as a gloomy thing is a contradiction in terms: it is as gross a contradiction as to speak of a light darkness, or of a sorrowful joy: for joy is one of the things in which that salvation consists which God is, which God gives. Hence a man ought not only to have the salvation, but also the joy of it. It is not enough that we know God, and are known of Him, we must also joy in God. We are as much bound to have the joy of the salvation as the salvation itself. When it is lost we should pray, "Restore;" and that we may do so rightly, we must confess, and repent, and find pardon, and then comes peace in believing, and joy in the Holy Ghost follows. It is a positive Christian duty to rejoice evermore: to adorn the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by a glad heart, and a joyful countenance. It is a first duty to make sure of the salvation, and then to have and display the joy of it; that men be not repelled, but attracted to come, and with joy to draw water out of our wells of salvation.

Then the salvation is God's: the Psalmist speaks of "*thy* salvation." The joy of it is from Him, as well as the thing itself. It is all of God, from the



first planning to the final consummation of it. It is God that worketh it for us, and it is He also who worketh it in us. No part of it is due to man, and therefore man gets no part of the glory. All the saints in heaven join with one voice, and with one heart, in the song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests." All is of grace, and all is of God, that no flesh might glory in His presence; but ~~him~~ that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. It was a favourite and frequent saying of Simeon of Cambridge, "O Lord, Thou art my Saviour, and I am Thy servant." Another Simeon, older than he, and long before his day, once said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And David, long before Simeon's day again, was in the habit of offering this petition, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

David had tasted the joy of sin. He had not held back his hand for fear either of man or of God, but had grasped all that lust desired. Of that cup he had drunk his fill: it seemed very pleasant, but, lo, in the end it was bitter. Now that he has come

to himself, he would return to his Father : the unholy fire had burnt out, and left bitter, cold ashes behind it ; and now he seeks back piteously, what so foolishly and wickedly he had sinned away, the deep, true, holy, abiding joy of " thy salvation." This king may read a lesson to all kings, and much more to all below the rank of kings ; of all the joys that were to be had, there is no joy on earth like joy in God, the joy of " Thy salvation."

But he is not satisfied with a mere restoration : he adds, " and *uphold* me with thy free Spirit." The word which is here rendered " free " means noble, liberal, generous : those qualities which we attribute to princes, and which they ought to possess : princely, kingly, noble qualities. That Spirit which possesses the qualities which are the very opposite of those which I have displayed all through this vile and lamentable transaction. With that Spirit do Thou uphold me. Not only give me back my joy, but uphold me in the possession of it. He knows well that though he has it, he will not keep it long unless God keep it for him, and keep it in him by His own withholding and upholding power.

God has taught this man. The sin, and the fall

he made, taught him that his sufficiency is of God alone: that, if again left to himself, he will surely fall. Thus a loving mother chooses a fitting place, and a fitting time, to let her little child fall: it is learning to walk: it is getting over-confident: it may come to a dangerous place, and if possessed of all this confidence, may fall and destroy itself. So she permits it to fall at such a place, and in such a way, as that it may be hurt, wholesomely hurt, but not dangerously so. It has now lost its confidence, and clings all the more fondly and trustingly to the strong hand that is able to hold up all its goings. So this David, this little child of the great God, has fallen: it is a sore fall; all his bones are broken: but it has been a precious and a profitable lesson to him: he has no confidence any longer in himself: his trust is not now in an arm of flesh: "Hold thou up my goings, and I shall be safe: uphold me with thy free Spirit."

This is our only security: left to ourselves, we surely fall. O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. We do not know how to go: where and when to stop. We must watch the pillar cloud

by night, as well as by day. We cannot keep our hearts from the force of temptation: we cannot do any good thing as of ourselves. All my springs are in Thee. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help: my safety cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. .

VER. 13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways ;  
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

HE uses this as an argument with God. It is one of the pleas he puts in, as if he had said, "O Lord, I know that Thou hast Thy heart set on the conversion of sinners : that Thou lovest to see Thy people going after them to compel them to come in, that Thy house may be filled : as I now am, I cannot do this : as I am, I am quite unfit so much as to take Thy name into my mouth : but do all this for me : cleanse me : clothe me anew, give me joy : send me forth under Thy Spirit's strength and guidance, and *then* will I teach transgressors Thy ways : then shalt Thou be made glad by seeing poor, lost sinners brought in, and made to praise Thy holy name." This is his argument, and it is a plea that has power, and prevails, with God.

Observe, that a man must not only have salvation, but also the joy of it, before he can effectually

teach transgressors the ways of God. Your acts, your looks, the tones of your voice, teach as much as your words, perhaps much more. A man going forth with gloom and sorrow in his heart, is not fit to teach others the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Paul was rejoicing always and everywhere. In stripes, in bonds, in imprisonments: even in the jail at Philippi, Silas and he, with bruised and bloody backs, not only prayed, but sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them: the jailer, too, doubtless. What kind of religion can this be that makes men so joyous under stripes, and imprisonment, and other foul wrongs? Their very joy was teaching God's ways unto transgressors: their joy was preparing the way for God's admission into the jailer's heart, so that he was ready to cry out at the first crisis, "What shall I do to be saved?" It is only men that possess the salvation of God, and the joy of that salvation, who should teach God's ways unto transgressors. Were it only taught by such men, and no other, then would more transgressors learn God's ways, and more sinners would be converted unto Him. God uses men of this stamp as His instruments. God uses men as in-



struments to convert others who themselves are full of joy in God, men who rejoice and are glad in God's salvation.

A man must *know* God's way before he can teach it to others. The men who have travelled a road are the best guides along that way. Experience is the best teacher. There is no preacher to transgressors so powerful as the men who themselves have obtained much mercy. What teacher in all the Church has God ever raised up like unto this very David himself? His psalms have ever been Zion's sweetest songs. And in the New Testament dispensation the woman of Samaria is a striking example. So soon as the Lord revealed to her all that was in her heart, she began to teach transgressors His ways, and sinners were converted unto Him. She was forgiven much, and she loved much. What preacher like Paul, the murderer of the first martyr? He says, "But I obtained mercy:" he calls himself a "pattern": says, in substance, "After me nobody need despair." What labours of love, what unwearied pains, and preachings, and writings! God taught him His way: God sent him forth full of the joy of salvation, and sinners were

converted, and transgressors taught God's ways. Bunyan too: and Newton. These men were both great sinners: they knew well God's ways: they went forth with shining faces, and taught them to others, and the result was, that, through their means, thousands of sinners were converted to God. They knew God's way: they taught it to others: they had tasted and seen that God is gracious: they told what they knew, spake because they believed, and multitudes were added unto the Church.

David was a king: a king too of a great people, and had quite enough work of all kinds on his hands: yet he says, I will teach transgressors Thy ways. If it was this king's duty so to do, what is the duty of men less high in rank, less full of important public affairs? If it is the duty of a king to teach God's ways unto transgressors, what is the duty of a merchant, of a physician, of a member of any of the educated, learned, professions? And if this be the duty of a king, how low down in the scale should it come, and where should the duty stop? It is every man's business to inquire whether it should stop with him, whether he, too, if he knows any thing of God's ways, should not teach



what he does know to others, that sinners may be converted. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come And let him that heareth say, Come." Let him that heareth say precisely the same thing which the Spirit and the bride also say. Let him teach transgressors God's ways, in short. It is one of the worst legacies the Papacy has left us, this new division of the Church into cleric and laic: and therewith the idea, that it is the sole and whole business of the clerics to teach God's ways unto transgressors: while it is the duty of the laics to stand by and see it done, but to take no active, responsible part in it. I say this is about the worst legacy we inherit, and still keep possession of, from the Papists. This is the largest mass of the Papacy I see anywhere entire among us all. The apostolic doctrine is, that we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that we should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. And let *him that heareth* say, Come.

The great thing that transgressors need to be taught is "Thy ways." They need to know God's

ways. They do not know them. Transgressors do not know how good God is : how good pardon is : how tenderly God pardons : how kindly. If we did but know the joy of Thy salvation ! This is life eternal, that we may know Thee, the only true God. And oh, if Jerusalem had but known ; had she but known what was in that gentle heart, which she bruised, and crushed, and trampled on ! If men would only teach other men God's ways ! If men who have been transgressors themselves, but who have also obtained mercy, would only go forth and say, "Come and see : is not this the Christ?"

One of the chief ends of all teaching is, that sinners may be converted. If that be not the result, the pains bestowed will prove but labour in vain. This ought to be the aim of every man whom God has taught, and who, therefore, goes forth to teach others. This is the one thing needful. What good can you do another man, so long as the wrath of God abideth on him ? What substantial good can you do a condemned man, if you do not get his sentence of death revoked ? Can it be revoked : can the condemned criminal be pardoned ? If so, are you so mad and foolish as to spend your valuable

time and his in decorating his cell and ornamenting his person, not concentrating every energy first on pardon, mercy? The moment of his execution may arrive before you have finished that painting: and it will then serve no other end than a flower that is cast into a felon's grave. Pardon is the one thing needful for every unpardoned man. Till he gets that, all blessings are curses: his life is only a living death. Ye must be born again. And except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

I add a word confirmatory from David Dickson : —“As the end of seeking mercy to ourselves should be this, that we may be enabled to be the instruments of glorifying God and saving of others; so the sensible feeling of mercy, which is sought after, doth greatly encourage a man to the work: *then*, will I teach: then, that is, when the joy of God's salvation is restored to me, and I confirmed somewhat in the grace of God. As the way which God keepeth in manifesting His justice against transgressors, and His mercy to self-condemned sinners flying to Him in Christ, is not known by nature to sinners so long as they go on in their evil course,

or before they be effectually taught to know both : so none is so fit to teach and persuade them of this mystery as they who by frequent experience are acquainted with the ways of God."

"And to this some add also his declaring how severely God often afflicts His own children when they sin against Him. That he would endeavour that, as his sin had been an occasion of much hurt to others, so his repentance should likewise be improved for the good of others."\* As if he had said, 'Lord, pardon me, make Thy face to shine : fill me with Thy joy ; and I will go forth, and warn them that are Thine to take heed. I will tell them of the bones which Thou hast broken : of the hardness of the way of transgressors : and how severely Thou rebukest for sin so long as men remain in it : and how tenderly Thou pardonest when they repent and turn from it.'

It is work fit for a king to teach the ways of God to transgressors. There was no brighter jewel in all David's crown than this, that he had been the means of the conversion of many sinners. There is a day coming when the men who have most of this

\* Annotations, &c., by Arthur Jackson, *ut supra*.

wealth will be regarded as the true *millionnaires*. David will be marked and conspicuous in that day, not as king over all Israel, but as the man who made known the ways of God to his fellow-sinners, and through whose kindly warnings many were born again, and became sons of God.



VER. 14. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation : and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

THIS doubtless refers to the death of Uriah by the sword of the children of Ammon. So long as David was living in a state of sin, he comforted himself with the thought that he had no concern in Uriah's death. Did he not fall in war : was he not fairly slain by the sword of the enemy in the loyal discharge of duty to his king and country ? Sin blinds a man's eyes to sin : each sin by its own nature leads on to another, and extenuates that other in the eyes of the sinner. But God has laid His hand upon him. The clear, holy eye looks in to his heart : every cloak and covering is stripped off, and the sinner, naked and open in God's sight, is clearly displayed also to himself. He now knows right well that he wished to get rid of Uriah : that he did deliberately plan and purpose his death, and compelled others to be his guilty tools. Uriah and others died. Their blood stained



his soul. He had done these men to death. He had shut their eyes for ever to all the sights, and their ears to all the sounds, of this fair earth : had sent them out of this world : up to the judgment-bar of the great God, perhaps altogether unprepared for so mighty a change. Oh the guilt of murder ! How the bloody blot clings and cleaves to the soul, and will not out night nor day ! Again, and again, he reverts to it in thought ; now for the first time he ventures to give it expression, and in the doing of it, pours out his whole soul in an earnest cry for deliverance from it.

What thoughts we have of a murderer ! How we shrink back with horror from the very thought of touching him, as if the stain of blood that is on him would communicate itself to us. But there is another sort of murder, a guilt of blood that lies at the door of many of us, and to which we give but little heed. Did we ever, by precept or example, lead a brother into sin : and did he live and die in his sin ? Does the blood of that soul not lie at our door ? \* Are we not guilty at least art and part :

\* "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents : I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these."—JER. ii. 34.



and if no more, are we not consenting to his death? What sort of sleep could we find if we had even by carelessness done anything that either directly caused, or in a remote degree helped to the death of a man? If we saw a dangerous place or thing on a public road, passed an unwary traveller going in that direction, and passed him unwarned: and if his feet stumbled, and he fell, and died a bloody death, what would be our thoughts and feelings concerning ourselves? If we saw our neighbour's house on fire, knew that the family were all asleep, passed in to our own house, and went to our rest, and were informed next day that the house was burnt down to ashes, and that the whole family had perished in the flames, what would be our thoughts of ourselves? Did we never pass a man unwarned, who for the lack of our warning went on and down, his feet stumbled on the dark mountains, and his soul perished for lack of knowledge which we had, and might have communicated to him? Do we know of no mother who has seen her child perish before her eyes, because she failed to warn and instruct, failed above all to preach that most effective of all sermons, a

godly, holy, and self-denying life? \* What a question for fathers, masters, servants, ministers of God's Word? As a friend standing related to a friend, how is it with you, dear reader? Is there no friend before whom you stand convicted this day of being altogether careless about his soul? You have acted towards him as if it were immaterial to you whether he had a soul or not, whether he stood in any right and good relation towards God or not. Have you done what you could? When a dear friend is sick, we have cared for him: we have gone and sent to inquire after him: we have rejoiced in his recovery: we have congratulated him with all cordiality thereupon. In his business, too, we have been glad that it was well with him: but how have we acted towards him, so as to shew our

\* "Hence mark the reason why so many great and learned men, of excellent gifts, wit, and learning, do not convert many souls to God. It is because they either teach not God's ways, but their own ways, their wit, eloquence, and devices; or else, though they teach well, yet they live ill, and so cause their doctrine to be less regarded, and weaken the power of it by their sinful life. And it pleases God in His great mercy to use the labour of His poor servants, who dare not utter nor speak their own word, nor seek themselves, but God's Word in plain evidence and simplicity, and live according to their teaching: the Lord doth bless their labours for the conversion of sinners and saving of poor souls."—*Old Author*.

belief that he had a soul : that he had a life of blessing or of cursing to begin after death ? Have we not ignored, in many cases, the very existence of his soul ? Have we not murdered his soul : that is, actually treated him, and acted towards him, as if he had no soul at all, and no life beyond the grave ? Do these sins lie at our door ? Do they, in any measure, in whole or in part, lie at our door ? If so, they are not less, but greater sins in the eye of God, that is, in the eye of perfect truth, than murder. They are greater, precisely in the proportion that the soul is greater than the body, eternity than time, and God than man. So great is the guilt of sinning, by either omission or commission, against our neighbour's soul. And yet so insensate are we that these sins lie lightly upon us : we do not feel their weight : our conscience does not much trouble us on account of them : they do not prevent us from eating, and sleeping, and enjoying life with a relish and in peace. They do not come between us and rest ; lying upon us as a black and heavy burden, from which we can get no deliverance till we have seen it roll off at the foot of the cross. Deliver *me* from blood-guiltiness, O God !

God alone can deliver from this sin, from any sin. All men may condone my sin, forgive it, forget it: but if God has not pardoned, forgiven, and forgotten, then all that is as nothing. It would have been comparatively an easy thing for David to have found forgiveness from men. Men are easily disposed to forgive a great sin, the very greatest of sins, to a king. David goes to the fountain-head, and seeks pardon, first, from God alone. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God.

He addresses God as the God of his salvation. Salvation is all of God. We had this before in the twelfth verse. David does not weary repeating it: it is a comforting thought. God is our salvation, and the end of it. He guides it, directs it, is responsible for it: He is all that is summed up in this expression, the God of it. God is the author of it, the finisher of it: how great then must it be: how shall we escape if we *neglect* so great salvation: and what shall they do who *reject* it?

God is the God of salvation as a whole; and it is because He is so, that He is the God of each particular part. David prays, Deliver me from a

special sin, from this particular sin, thou God who deliverest me from all sin. Faith does not rest in general propositions, to the neglect of the particular. It makes the general the ground of the particular. Many people speak devoutly of that blood of Christ which cleanseth us from all sin, and yet do not go to Him for an application of it to cleanse them from each particular sin. Faith is of such a sort that it applies the truth to the special matter in hand. "Upon the general grounds of the covenant of grace made with us for salvation through Christ, must a soul seek to have particular mercies: Deliver me, O God, thou God of my salvation."

In the matter of salvation God has a work to do, and the believer also has a work to do. God's work is to save, to deliver: the believer's work is to praise. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness," that is Thy work: "and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness," that is my work. It is Thine to do the work; it is mine to shew forth the praises of the workman: it is Thine to set the prisoner free; it is the freed prisoner's life-work to shew forth Thy glory.

It was only in the last verse (ver. 13) that David

began to speak of working for God. He speaks of it often enough now. But first there must be pardon and peace and full acceptance: then comes the work. The burden must first be taken off: the sick man must first be cured: then can he work. It is the forgiven who pray and praise. The woman who was forgiven much loved much. No progress is made in the work of obedience until you go forth to it in the assurance of pardon. The just shall live by his faith. His faith will first shew itself in its effects on the man who has it, and then on others about and around him. What is the praise worth that comes from guilty lips? What is the praise worth that is defiled by blood, and that comes from an unclean heart? It is when all is clean, that the song of praise is sweet and full. There can come no praise from a man so long as he is under the guilt of unforgiven sin. The key that opens the door of praise is pardoning grace and mercy. They that go down to the dust of death do not praise God. There is no praise to God in the fearful pit, and in the miry clay. It is when a man is taken out, his feet put on a rock,



and his goings established: it is then that the new song, even praise to our God, is put into his mouth.\*

It is God's righteousness he is to praise: my tongue shall sing aloud of *Thy* righteousness. It is a righteous deliverance alone that he seeks, and therefore it is a righteous deliverance which he will celebrate with praise. What God gives and what God does, He must give and do righteously. Grace reigns: but it reigns through righteousness. The righteousness is gracious and the grace is righteous. The deliverance from blood-guiltiness must be got in such a way as to leave God as it found Him, the God of righteousness. It must be given in conformity with law. It must not be done at the cost of justice. Mercy and truth must be made to meet together: righteousness and peace must kiss each other. This is the mystery of the gospel, God a

\* "It is impossible for any man or woman who has truly tasted of God's mercy in Christ for life and salvation, to keep it in so as it shall not break forth and appear: but he that hath his heart affected with God's mercy in Christ it will untie his tongue to relate of it, and to praise God for it. As it is not possible to keep fire so close but it will smoke, and flame, in time, so the feeling of God's love cannot but flame out, and appear to the comfort of others."—*Old Author*.

Saviour and yet a just God : God delivering men from the guilt of blood, and yet remaining righteous. This is the wisdom taught in the school of Christ. This is what Christ does : justifying the ungodly, and yet magnifying the law and making it honourable.

Some speak of the righteousness which the Psalmist is to praise as if it were the personal rectitude and holiness of God's character. But how can this be? What then does the Psalmist mean? Is it a righteous thing to forgive sin without atonement? Is it a righteous thing to deliver a man from the black guilt of murder and adultery, to wink at it, and say nothing more about it? Is that personal rectitude, uprightness, holiness? If it is the personal righteousness of God that is meant, it is that righteousness which provides and brings us a righteousness, and makes it ours before He pardons, on the ground, and by the imputation, of which alone He gives us pardon. If I am to sing of God's righteousness, it is because He provides me with a righteousness, and will not pardon me without it : but does completely pardon me on account of it. This righteousness is



entirely of God's purposing, planning, and providing. This alone He accepts, with this He is ever well pleased, and this the believer never wearies exalting and praising. It is the substance of his song in time: it will be his theme throughout eternity. He hath made Him who knew no sin, sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. "O Lord Jesus," said Luther, "I am Thy sin, Thou art my righteousness." It is this righteousness, doubtless, which the Psalmist here desires to praise. Elsewhere he speaks of it in terms that cannot be mistaken. "Hear me when I call, God of my righteousness." Some would translate the phrase, "God of my righteousness," by "my righteous God"; as if that were a subject of thanksgiving! Whereas the most terrible of all subjects to a sinner is simply a righteous God if He comes to him without a righteousness.

This is the right explanation, which is given by David Dickson in one of his brief but pregnant notes on the verse. "The righteousness of God which consisteth in the remission of sin, and imputation of Christ's obedience to us through faith, according to God's promise, is the matter of

our joy and song of praise to God : which praise a soul being in thralldom by felt guiltiness can hardly sing, but after the intimation of pardon will sing it cheerfully, ‘Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, then shall my tongue sing aloud of thy righteousness.’”

There can be no personal righteousness in God when He comes to justify a sinner unless He brings a righteousness with Him. “Hearken unto me,” says He, “ye that are stout-hearted and far from righteousness, I bring near my righteousness.” This is the righteousness which is fully proclaimed in the gospel, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe : that He might be just and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

To sing aloud of God’s righteousness is simply another way of denying our own. To take His is to acknowledge our own blindness, poverty, emptiness, nakedness. Nature needs it not. It says, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men.” Grace feels its need, and cries, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Paul in a state of nature, and touching the righteousness which is of the law, was blameless. He stood in need of nothing. Paul in

a state of grace, counted all things but loss, that he might win Christ and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith. God is one. He has but one method of justifying. Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, was justified in this same way. And David, the man after God's own heart, sings aloud not of his own, for of that he has none, but of God's righteousness. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; for therein is revealed this same everlasting and perfect righteousness of God from faith to faith.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

VER. 15. *O Lord, open thou my lips : and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.*

THIS verse is connected in thought with the preceding. It arises out of it. David had spoken of himself. He was to do something. God was to deliver him : he was to praise God. He : but he ! who and what was he ? *My tongue*—but, Lord, who am I ? What am I, that I should make such promises ? I who have so vilely and so often fallen, shall I praise Thee ? The thing is impossible ; for in me dwelleth no good thing. I am forgetting already. I am speaking as if there were some strength and stability in me. And I have proved the reverse. It is not for me to promise anything : it is not for me even to speak of thanking Thee for Thy pardoning mercy and forgiving grace. O Lord, open *Thou* my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. Work in me, and I will work for Thee. Give and I will give Thee. Put the song into my

mouth and I will sing it.\* Here, as often, as ever, there is a work done by God, consequent upon which there is a work done by the believer. God does something, and thereupon the believer does something. God precedes, the believer follows. These are they that follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth. It is God's work to open the lips: it is then the believer's work, with these God-opened lips to shew forth the praise of Him that opened them. God alone can open the lips which death has closed. God alone can raise up a dead body: and God alone can raise a dead soul to life. God has given us much power over many diseases. A skilful physician will grapple with a disease, and putting forth all his power, will overcome it, and put it to the rout. But when the pulse is still, the breath has fled, and cold obstruction has settled down upon the silent, stiff body, then he stands by with folded hands. There is no work for him to do. Death has done his work here. There is only one power that can grapple with death, and God has kept that power altogether in His own hands. God must open

\* "And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."—Ps. xl. 3.

our lips, spiritually, or we remain dumb and dead for ever. But God does it. He hears the cry of the deaf, dumb, blind, dead : He hears their cry and does it for them. And He does it most surely, and speedily, when they come to Him feeling *first* fully that they cannot do it themselves, and *second*, that the living God alone in heaven or in earth can do it for them. So long as a man has any faith left in himself, his faith in God is to that extent imperfect, a nonentity. All the faith he has in himself is to be deducted from the faith he thinks he has in God. A man will never go to God in downright earnest so long as he feels that he can do something considerable towards helping himself. It was when Peter felt the water yielding under him, and that he was sinking, that he cried out heartily, " Help, Lord, I perish." I was brought low, and He helped me. So long as we feel that we can praise God whenever we please, we will give ourselves very little trouble on the matter : but when we are brought to feel that God must open our lips, before we can in any true and acceptable way shew forth His praise, then we go to God and seek. We seek in faith, believing that He can :



we seek in confidence, believing that He will : we seek in assurance, believing that He is willing to open our lips, and seeking thus we find, and getting from God we give what we get back to God : what He gives us in grace, we give Him back in glory. God opens our lips, and our mouth shews forth His praise. Till then we are dumb. If God does not open our lips, our mouth can never praise Him. Sing we may, music, sweet, and beautiful, and acceptable to man. Sing we may, and with many accompaniments : music of many voices, and of many added instruments we may produce : but sweet music is not heart's praise. God will not accept solemn sounds for the heart's harmony. God will not accept the sonorous organ for the music of a broken heart, and a contrite spirit. It is not the outward sound which God hears, it is the inward sigh, the upward look of love, and the heart-thrill of gratitude ; that is the music which God demands, accepts, and loves to hear. And so, when God does open our lips, and puts the new song into our mouth, we do praise. We cannot but speak then. There may be little of what men call melody in its outward tones : to human ears

the music may be harsh, and hoarse, grim, rude, barbaric, but angels love it, God listens to it with delight. It may want every grace, and every beauty, which art loves to listen to ; it may have a thousand faults, both of time and of tune ; but if the soul is stirred with gratitude, if the heart is strung with faith and love, and the lips are opened, and God puts the song into the mouth, then is the outcome praise, even praise unto our God. There may be nothing to attract the human ear ; yea, there may possibly—though there need not—be much to repel : the man, thus taught of God, may not have one atom of the artistic power of music about him, yet he sings, he praises, God hears it and loves it ; it is to Him the sweet music of a loving human soul. The heart is the wondrous instrument whose full, deep, rich tones God has reserved for Himself. If the heart is there all is there : if the heart is wanting, you may have the most perfect sounds of harmony that ever came forth of human lips, and all instruments added, but in the ear of God all is nothing other than dull, dumb, dead silence. It is the tuned heart and the God-opened lips alone that are God's songsters.

All besides is but the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal.\*

All this is connected, too, with the preceding verse. It is pardoned men that are praising men. The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But David is seeking to praise God. He is seeking to be made clean that he may praise God, seeking to have his lips opened that so he may sing.† Men with unconfessed, and therefore unforgiven sin upon them, cannot praise : they do not try. It has been said that either praying will make a man give over sinning, or sinning will make a man give over praying. This is as true of praise. Sinning may not cause a man to leave off singing, but it does put an end to all praise. When a great congregation unites publicly in prayer, how many true believing petitions are ascending from living hearts?

\* “ Here, in this verse, David, finding and feeling his mouth, as it were, fast stopped, and his lips tied up by reason of his sins and the feeling of God’s anger, entreateth Him to open his lips again, and to give him matter of praise and thanksgiving.”—*Samuel Smith, ut supra.*

† He prays, “ Deliver me from blood-guiltiness in the matter of Uriah—because men that lie in their sins are not fit to praise God, which, in the next clause, he was to promise to God—and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.”—*Annotations, &c., by Arthur Jackson.*

When a huge volume of sweet sound rises and swells up from a great congregation, how much of it is the grave sweet melody of a blood-sprinkled heart which God hears? It is the living that praise, the pardoned who bless the Lord. Praise is comely: but only for the upright.

Then it is "*thy* praise" that is to be celebrated. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." God does all the work, and therefore He gets all the glory. This is ever the song of the Church below, and it is still more emphatically the song of the redeemed above. "Unto him that loved us, unto him be glory." There is no division here. There is no disputed merits, no controversy as to who is justly entitled to all the glory. All is of grace, and all is of God: He is both the Alpha and the Omega, the Author and the Finisher of the faith; and as His is all the work, His also, without doubt, and without dispute, is all the glory. Do the work and reap the reward: open the lips and get the praise.

There is a strong argument hidden here. God loves His people's praise. All things were made, and are maintained, that they may give God praise,

and shew forth His glory. Man is the mouthpiece of the whole creation here below. He alone can speak for sun, moon, and stars, and for birds and beasts, trees and flowers, and for the great deep beneath, and around, and above him. If he is silent, then they are all silent. Man should look up, and around, and beneath, and gathering together all that he sees, hears, and can know of God's wondrous wisdom and goodness, as displayed in the work of His hands, he should offer it up to God in songs of thankfulness, a living sacrifice of praise. But if sin has sealed his lips, all this is silent. If guilt lies upon his soul, and his conscience is defiled with sin, then there is no praise to God : all is still, in the dumb silence of death. The Psalmist prays, Lord, open Thou my lips : take Thou away all my sin : make me to hear joy and gladness : deliver me from blood-guiltiness : thus and otherwise open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth Thy praise.

I add one of David Dickson's suggestive notes : "Howsoever proud spirits think that they can do anything they please in God's service, yet a humbled soul under exercise knoweth that it is God, that giveth both to will and to do of His good plea-

sure. Such a man knoweth that the habit of grace is a gift, and the bringing forth of the habit to exercise is another gift: he knoweth that when one hath gotten grace to *will* to praise God, he must have grace to put this will to act effectually: this the Psalmist doth acknowledge, and prayeth, "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

What poor weak creatures we are! We cannot so much as praise God. How totally are we fallen and corrupt! We can take the gift, but we have not so much grace left as to enable us to return thanks to God the Giver. In us dwelleth no good thing to which we can lay claim as our own. A beggar in rags can thank you for the alms you give him: the ox knoweth his owner, the ass his master's crib: a dog will turn and caress his master's hand when he smites him: but we are altogether as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We have to pray that God would come and open our lips, before our mouth can so much as shew forth even His praise.





















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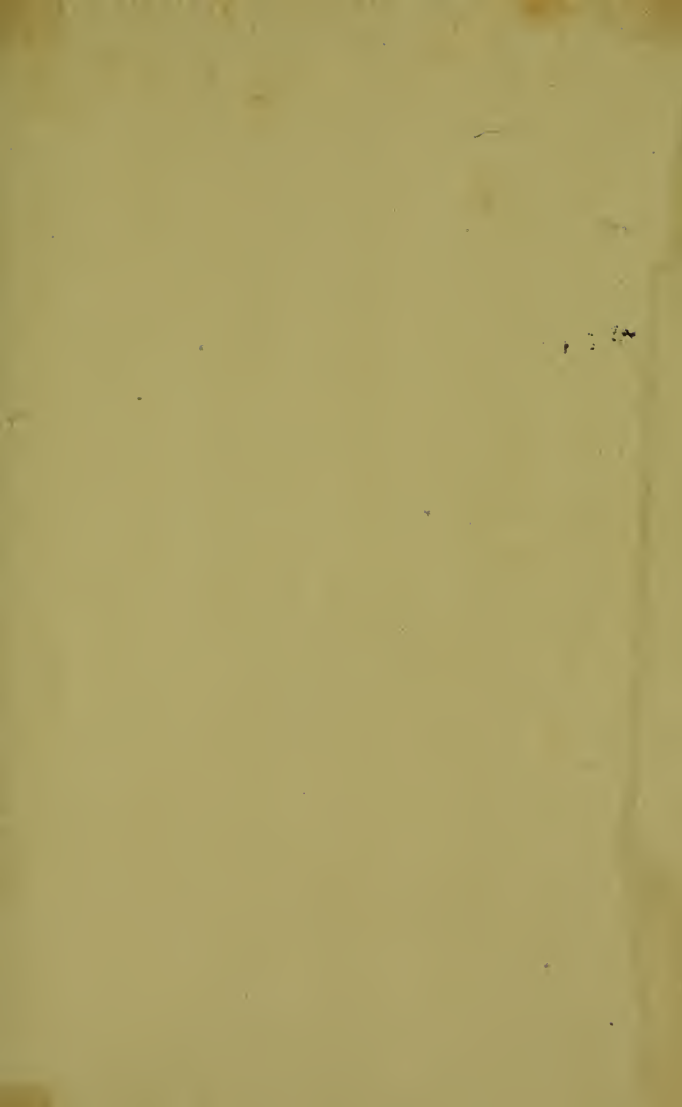
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